

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1032.—VOL. XL.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 10, 1883.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[A MINISTERING ANGEL.]

THE LOST STAR.

CHAPTER IV.

"Come down, and speak to me as quickly as you can," were the words that came through the darkness.

"I'm coming dearest," and Ruby darted into her bedroom, caught up her fur-cloak, and for some inexplicable reason which puzzled herself, slipped the bottle of medicine on the mantel-piece into her pocket, and opening her door softly, sped swiftly and stealthily down the broad stairs across the vast hall, along a short passage into the breakfast-room. This room was exactly under her own, and not being on the terrace, like most of the sitting-rooms, communicated with the garden by a small iron staircase.

The house was as silent as death; not a sound came from either smoking or billiard-room, which surprised her much. Concluding that Lord Alverley had taken the whole party to dine at a neighbouring Squire's she breathed more freely, though her fingers were trembling so that she could scarcely unbar the shutter,

or open the French window. But when this was accomplished she flew down the staircase, with arms already held out in eager affection.

Violet St. Heliers threw herself upon her sister's neck, and sobbed,

"Something terrible must have happened—what is it?" asked Ruby, in the greatest anxiety, as she kept her close against her heart.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake."

"Nothing; only I could not bear it any longer. It was so miserable without you."

"But at this time of night!" in tender reproach.

"Yes, I know; but I thought you would not like me to come in the daytime. It might—" with a small smile on her quivering lips—"it might be a case of 'no followers allowed.'"

"As if they would keep my sister from me! But how did you know my window from the others? Only think if you had made a mistake, and one of Lord Alverley's friends had discovered you?"

"There was no chance of that. Have you forgotten the drawing you sent me? There was a little staircase just under your room, and I knew it by that. I walked all round the

place till I came to it, feeling like a burglar, but there was nobody about."

"Poor child, what a mad idea! Come in, I must speak to Mrs. Nicholson. I don't suppose Lady Chester could possibly object to your sleeping with me."

"I'm not coming in."

"But you *must*."

Violet shook her head resolutely. "I swore by everything that was most binding that I would come home by the 11.15 train, and the poor old thing would never trust me again."

"How could she let you come?"

"I did not ask her," with a soft laugh. "She saw that nothing would keep me away, so wisely gave in. But don't worry yourself about me, for she is actually coming to the station to meet me. I travelled third-class because my money was nearly at an end, and a charming navvy offered me an orange out of his grimy pocket."

Ruby shivered.

Violet patted her cheek affectionately. "I believe you think I am fit to be wrapped up in cotton-wool, and placed in a band-box, whilst you are knocking about the world without a

thought or care for yourself. Oh, Ruby!" and down went the soft cheek upon her sister's shoulder. "I feel such a brute for letting you work for us both, but I couldn't do it you know—no one would have me. I never could remember a date, and as to geography I sometimes think I never could have learnt it."

"Now Violet, haven't I always told you," and Ruby's sweet voice was very grave, "that I could not get on at all if it weren't for the thought that you were waiting for me somewhere; no matter how small the lodgings, it is everything to have one little spot to call your home!" The tears were rolling down her cheeks, but she brushed them hastily away. "If you really must go by that horrid train I suppose we ought to be off."

"Are you coming with me?" in great delight.

"Of course I am—at least across the park, and then the station is only such a little way off down the high-road; but I must take care to secure my retreat," she said, with a smile, as she ran up the staircase, blew out her candle, pulled the shutter to without barring it, shut the window, and came back to her sister as speedily as possible.

"Oh, Ruby, I have such a heap to ask you," sighed Violet, "and the time is so short."

"Ask away," said Ruby, trying to be gay. "And it will be my turn next. This way through the garden is the shortest; but as old Nurah used to say we must put our best foot foremost."

"I haven't a best foot; both are as tired."

"Poor child, lean on me."

"Ruby," in a shy whisper, "you haven't heard anything of him!"

"Not for a long while. How could I? For six weeks I have been all alone in the house with the children."

A heavy sigh was the only answer.

"You must not think of him, Violet; I thought what dear papa told you was sufficient to cure you. You must be mad!"

"I know it; but, dropping my head sadly, "I like to be mad sometimes. If it were not for the hope of seeing him again, I should die. Only think, Ruby, what it is to go on day after day, as I do, in a miserable lethargy. I must look forward to something, or—"

"I know, dear," and a look of pain came across her face. "Bear it if you can with patience, and then when Aunt Annette comes back from India, perhaps she will tell you to live with her."

"And do you think I am such a wretch that I could be content, whilst you were slaving here?"

"If you thought it made me happy to know that you had a proper roof over your head?"

"Oh, I assure you in Chatterton-street we are as proper as possible; not a man comes to the house unless he has a tradesman's basket on his arm. I would have fallen ill on purpose to send for the doctor, only I was frightened by the thought of his bill."

"I am glad you were. Doctors may be as dangerous as anyone else. Now you must climb over this railing, take care of that stone, and here we are at the stile."

"You will come back to me at Christmas?" and Violet clung to her sister's neck, as if she could not make up her mind to part from her.

"I hope so. Take care of yourself, my darling, and never do this again. I think I had better come with you to the station."

"No you might get into trouble. Good-bye!" A long clinging kiss, a broken Heaven be with you, dear," from Ruby, and they parted; Violet flying down the high-road as fast as her legs could take her, and the sister whose mission it seemed to be to watch over her like a mother, standing still to look after her. A wave of the hand, as the slight figure which so exactly resembled her own, reached the corner, and Ruby turned away with a full heart.

The park looked doubly dark and gloomy as she turned her face homewards. Drawing the hood of her cloak further over her head, she went on bravely. There was a chink of light

behind Watson, the gamekeeper's shutter, so she went a few yards out of her way to leave the bottle of medicine for his boy. She was glad to do this for her own sake, as if anyone chanced to meet her on her return, it would give a reasonable pretext for her appearance in the park at that time of night.

Mrs. Watson answered her tap at once, but was extremely surprised at the sight of her visitor. "The boy, thank you, Miss, is that bad that I am well-nigh distracted; but law-a-mercy, to think of you a bringing of it on a night like this!"

"I forgot it before, and it doesn't rain or snow. I can't stop now, thank you; good-night, I shall come and ask after him to-morrow," and Ruby hurried away.

Mrs. Watson shut the door behind her, and followed her down the path. "You see," she said, in a mysterious whisper, "I can't keep the door open for a minute, lest them that shouldn't might see the light, and I haven't a man or boy about the place to send home with you, Miss; for they are all out with the gentlemen from the house, a watching for the poachers."

"Do you mean to say they are in the park?" and the poor girl's heart went down into her boots.

"Somewhere there about, I don't know precisely, but I haven't heard a shot all the evening through; so I doubt if somebody hasn't given them a warning. Good-night, and thank you kindly, Miss; if it weren't for my boy, I would come with you myself."

Poor Ruby felt lonely, indeed, when the cottage door shut, and she was left outside in the darkness; but soolding herself for her cowardice she hastened into the shadow of the wood, fearing lest someone might catch sight of her figure if she ventured across the open.

It was an unpleasant thought that, watching as she was all round her, although their owners were unseen, every tree might hide a poacher, or, worse still, one of the gentlemen who had come out for the purpose of catching him. Brightened by a sound behind her, which was probably a rabbit scudding through the bracken, disturbed from his sleep, she began to run, and when she had once begun, she lost the nerve to stop. The way was difficult enough to see in any case; but running so fast she soon lost the path, and was stumbling on through brambles and ferns, her heart beating loudly at every twigs that might have dress in her wild career.

There was no moon, and the sky was so cloudy that the stars gave little light. The grey stem of a silver birch looked like a ghost standing menacingly before her. With a deep-drawn breath she bounded to one side, and was caught panting and breathless in a pair of strong arms!

CHAPTER V.

"A woman, by George!" muttered a pleasant voice, under its breath, in a tone of quiet amusement.

Overwhelmed with fear, Ruby struggled frantically to get free, but whoever it was who had contrived to make her prisoner knew how to hold her fast, though very gently, in his firm grasp.

The shadow of a tree fell across his face, but instinct, as well as the refined tone of his voice, told her that she had to deal with no common man.

"As you are a gentleman, let me go," she gasped.

Instantly his hold relaxed.

"As you are a lady," he returned in a whisper, "I am bound to keep you here for your own sake, as well as ours. Do you know what we are waiting for?"

"Yes; and I will be as quiet as a mouse, if you will only let me go."

She lifted her face imploringly; the hood fell off her head, and though she raised her hand hastily to draw it back it was too late! He had seen enough to make a man of.

Lord Averley's disposition determine that, come what would, he must see more.

"Will you promise to stay here?" bending his head to scanner features curiously.

"No; I will run home as fast as ever I can."

"That's frank! Where is your home?"

"Chester Chase."

"Delighted to hear it: Would you mind telling me who you are?"—still in the lowest whisper, eager curiosity in the eyes she could not see.

"One of Lady Chester's household."

"Vague," with a puzzled shake of his head.

"Won't you be more explicit?" "What can it matter to you?" in feverish impatience, "whether I am dairymaid, housemaid, or anything else?"

"Everything," with a suppressed laugh; "because I should know where to look for you to-morrow. If you dust, so will I; if you make butter, I'll turn the churn; if you do anything else, I shall be most happy to help you."

Ruby threw back her head proudly, and then reflecting that it was, after all, advisable that he should take her for a servant, murmured laconically, "Please, sir, let me go, or I shall get such a scolding from Mrs. Nicholson."

He seemed vastly amused. As soon as he could steady his voice, he asked,—

"First tell me what you were doing out here all by yourself?"

She hesitated, for anything in the shape of darkness was obnoxious to her truthful nature.

"I had just taken a bottle of medicine to Mrs. Watson—her son is very ill. Now won't you let me go?"

"Not for the world; we expect some warm work presently, and by Jove, there they are," as a shot was heard in a distant copse. "I must be off; promise that you won't stir from this tree."

"I can't."

"You must," he said, imperiously, "If you go across the open you will have half-a-dozen keepers after you; if you go through the wood, you may come down the very gang we are looking for. Moreover, there is someone coming, and I don't know where you go till you do."

"I promise," she whispered, in despair, and he immediately released her.

There was a sound of footsteps coming cautiously over the dead leaves, and a voice, that Ruby instantly recognized as that of Captain Marion, called out in a cautious undertone,—

"Averley, where are you? What on earth are you waiting for?"

Ruby shrank behind the tree, whilst Averley answered, hastily, "You go ahead with Watson. I was just keeping a look-out on the hollow to the left. It seems a likely spot for Black George."

The steps retreated, and Ruby gave a sigh of relief.

"Were you afraid," he asked, as he fumbled with his watch-chain. "He shouldn't have seen you, as you didn't wish it, if I had had to knock him down in order to prevent it. Take care of these for me till I come back." He dropped his watch and chain into her hand, and then, pulling off his hat, for politeness to a woman he never forgot, he disappeared into the shadows.

Alone in a dismal wood, in the middle of the night, with not a single friend within call, and with the chance of being pounced on by a poacher, mistaken for a spy, and maltreated accordingly, the position was far from pleasant. It was bitterly cold, and Ruby, in her hurry to meet her sister, had simply caught up her fur-cloak, and thrown it over her evening dress. She had no veil to cover her face, no extra wrap for her soft white neck.

Shivering from head to foot, she crouched down in a little heap on the ground, thinking of Violet, the wild and winsome sister, who was at once the pleasure and the torment of her life. Many thoughts came crowding on her

mind, and leaning her face on her hands she abandoned herself to anxious reflection.

Shots were audible in the distance from time to time. Evidently Watson, the head-keeper, was determined to take his men red-handed, and had made up his mind to sacrifice a few rabbits, and herea for that purpose. Gradually a deep silence fell upon the night; the wind had gone down, not a leaf stirred; the birds were sleeping in their nests, the rabbits in their holes; and Ruby, utterly tired out by her exertions, slept like an exhausted child, when good-night has been said over her crib by loving lips.

It would have been a pretty night if there had been any light to see it by, and anyone there to see the small drooping head, with the curls of bright hair just peeping out from the sables of her hood, the fair pale face pillow'd on the fragile hand, the long lashes resting so heavily on the soft cheeks—a picture of innocence lost in a wood. But the picture suddenly started into life, and she sprang to her feet, every nerve quivering. A struggle was going on close at hand. Chained to the tree by her given word, as by a cord which no mortal's strength could break, she was constrained to stay where she was and listen with beating heart and bounding pulses, whilst she was longing to see as well as hear, and nearly mad to think that only a hundred yards off men were risking their lives and she could not stir a finger to help. The noise increased, a pistol-shot rang through the air, followed by a howl of rage or execration; there was a trampling of feet, a snapping of branches, as men's bodies seemed to sway to and fro amongst the dry wood—a storm of oaths, which made Ruby's blood run cold; a sudden outcry, followed by hasty steps in several directions.

"Hold on, my lord," cried Watson; "we've got four on 'em pretty safe."

"All right," rang out cheerfully through the darkness. "Here, Marston, strike a light. By Heaven, we've let the biggest rascal of all slip through our fingers."

Leaning forward as far as she could reach, Ruby obtained a fleeting view of the group through the trees. She saw Watson's sturdy figure standing over a prostrate poacher; Lord Alverley, as she supposed, with his foot on a man's chest; and Captain Marston, kneeling on the ground, struggling to tie the prisoner's wrists together with a bit of rope.

Before she could see anything more, the match went out, and the whole scene was enveloped in darkness. All danger seemed over for the night, and she was about to sit down again, on the root of the tree, and try to wait, with what patience she could, for release from parole, when she became aware, with a creepy feeling all down her backbone, that she was no longer alone. Somebody was stealing stealthily under the trees: she could hear the dead leaves crunch under his feet, though she could not see him.

Cowering as close as possible to the sheltering trunk of the oak, she slipped Lord Alverley's gold watch and massive chain into her bosom,—as usual thinking more of others than of herself—and clasping her hands together watched with parted lips, and wide-open startled eyes.

The man came close to her and stopped, perfectly unconscious of her vicinity. She could hear his heavy breathing, and gradually made out the rough outline of his figure. He was big, and broad-shouldered with a shabby sealskin cap drawn over his forehead, a bag slung over his back, a heavy-knocked stick in one hand, a gun in the other.

"You would like to do for me, would ya?" he growled with his face turned towards the spot where Ruby had last seen Lord Alverley standing. "If it weren't so d—d dark I'd put a handful of shot into yer, for the devil's own work ye have done this night."

As if to grant his unhallowed wish a freshly-lighted lantern, to Ruby's intense horror, brought the group once more into distinct relief against the dark background of shadows. Instantly he dropped down upon one knee, and deliberately loaded his gun. She watched him,

as if under a spell; her blood turned to ice—she tried to cry out, but her tongue seemed paralysed; she saw him take his aim full at the Viscount's fair close-cropped head; and then, when it was almost too late, she sprang forwards, and seizing the muzzle, forced it downwards. The gun went off, and she did not know if she had saved him or not.

"Curse you!" cried the startled poacher, nearly scared out of his wits by the unexpected apparition; then, leaving his stick behind him, he plunged into the thicket, knowing that life and liberty had been risked by this last ugly job; and Ruby, sinking down upon the ground, burst into a hysterical fit of tears.

Some of the keepers, meanwhile, enraged at Black George's dastardly revenge, started in eager pursuit, but the poacher was too wily for them, and knew of a hiding-place which had never failed him yet; so they came back after awhile, foiled and disappointed. Two of them passed close to the oak where Ruby was sitting, and alarmed her much, but they were talking so eagerly about their night's work that they never noticed her. The prisoners were led off between their triumphant guards, the gentlemen went back to the house, and Ruby was filled with all sorts of misgivings, lest Lord Alverley were seriously hurt, or had forgotten her.

Very likely Mrs. Nicholson had by this time discovered her absence from the house, a hue-and-cry would be raised, and she would die of shame, if shame were ever kind enough to kill. What would Lady Chester say if it was reported to her that her governess had been wandering about the park at midnight, and returned in company with her eldest son? Would anything induce her to believe that she had not gone out in consequence of an assignation? Common-sense would certainly favour the supposition, as under no circumstances would Ruby ever consent to lay the blame on Violet.

Tortured by every thought that had the power to sting, she sat still and waited, her cloak huddled round her, her head drooping dejectedly. The welcome sound of footsteps came slowly over the rustling leaves; she listened eagerly, not knowing whether to hope or fear; and the next minute Lord Alverley was standing before her, his left arm in a sling, extemporised for the occasion out of Watson's large red handkerchief.

CHAPTER VI.

"Poor child, so you've kept your word—I knew you would." He spoke as if he were tired out, all the life and vigour seemed to have gone out of his voice as he held out his hand to assist her to rise.

She got up without assistance. "I had almost made a vow never to promise again."

"Did you think I had forgotten you? You might have known I shouldn't."

"Excuse me, I know very little about you, except that you were nearly killed just now."

"Ah! did you see that? The beggar must have been quite close to you," stopping short to examine the spot.

"So close that he left his stick at my feet."

"Ah! here it is," stooping to pick it up.

"Watson will value it as an interesting relic. Did you actually see him fire—that must have been rather exciting? I wonder he didn't take better aim at so short a range, such a first-rate shot as he is, too."

She gave him his watch and chain which he had quite forgotten, and then walked on by his side in silence, not caring to claim his gratitude.

"I think it would only have been friendly of you if you had given a little scream; a woman can always find her tongue."

"I couldn't find mine," she said, with a little nervous laugh. "It seemed as if a sudden nightmare had come over me. I couldn't stir a finger, and I thought you would be killed, and I should feel ever afterwards as if I were your murderer. Of course it only lasted half an instant, but it seemed such a terrible

time," her agitation increasing, "the gun pointed at you, and I close by, looking on! I was nearly too late, but I think I saved your head."

"You mean that you actually had the courage to touch his gun!" speaking very slowly, in sheer amazement. "Why the fellow might have brain'd you on the spot!"

"He had no time to think of that—there was no danger."

"There was," he said, emphatically, "and you saved my life at the risk of your own." He stopped, overcome by the thought that a stranger—a poor weak girl, whose face he had never seen—should have ventured so much for him. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart," he said, with a catch in his breath, and feeling after her small hand in the darkness, he raised it respectfully to his lips. "Tell me your name—I must know it?"

"If you must, I suppose you will find it out," she answered composedly, feeling rather ashamed of her former agitation.

"That means you won't tell me," trying hard to catch sight of her features, under the shade of her hood.

"Lord Alverley, I never asked you how you hurt your arm," with sudden sympathy. "Is it very bad?"

"It aches rather; but how did you know my name?"

"You forgot that I heard Captain Marston call you by it."

"Marston, do you know him?"

She laughed. "When I was making the butter, or sweeping the stairs, or doing something else, I suppose, I made his acquaintance."

"What are you, in Heaven's name?"

"Something that is neither a carpet nor a doormat, but what men and women love to tread under foot." There was a touch of bitterness in her tone that caught his ear.

"Something that could never be at home, except in the highest position in any man's household," he supplemented gravely. "That, at least, I have had the sense to find out already."

She was thankful that he could not see the blushes which scorched her cheeks, as she tried to answer lightly. "Churns and brooms would be rather out of place up there."

"Some people lend a grace to everything they touch."

"Yes, and some people look best in the dark."

"Do you object to smoking?" he asked suddenly, as a bright idea occurred to him.

"Not in the least."

"Then perhaps you would not mind holding the box whilst I strike a light? I cannot manage them both with one hand."

Not suspecting his object, she stood still in the middle of the damp grass, which they were crossing so slowly in spite of the cold, and held out her hand for the box of lights.

The match was struck, the light flared up into her face, and then was thrown away.

"Where is your cigarette?" she asked in surprise.

"I forgot it, but I have seen your face, and that I shall remember all my life. Do you mean to say that you have been under the same roof with me for four days, and I never knew it!"

"Lord Alverley, you have taken a mean advantage of me," very coldly.

"Think of the temptation!"

"Idle curiosity—nothing but that."

"Natural curiosity, if you like."

"That is no excuse; it is natural to some men to steal other people's belongings, but it does not make it right or gentlemanly."

"It is natural to me to make the most of my opportunities when I am—" he hesitated, afraid to enrage her by a compliment, "with a woman like yourself. I can't help my nature."

"We may all say that, but it won't make it true."

"Not true? when some men have no more heart than a pumice-stone, and others would barter their souls for a woman's smile."

"Some men put a bearing rein on their

horses, and leave their own passions unbridled."

"Yes, because they don't enjoy it when their horses run away with them; but there is a pleasure in breaking loose sometimes," he answered with a smile, looking down upon the face beside him, glad to know that it was fair.

A man on horseback passed quickly down the drive at a little distance.

"Who is that?" she asked, in surprise.

"Probably one of the grooms going for the doctor."

"But is anyone hurt?"

Before answering, he leant against the gate which led to the private grounds as if for support.

"There were one or two broken heads."

"I am sure you are in pain," with anxious sympathy, as he stopped with a half-suppressed groan.

"I feel as if five hundred redhot pincers were tearing at my flesh," he said, very quietly. "Let us push on."

"And you actually waited for me when you were in agony all the while!"

"I assure you I couldn't walk faster, and as to that, I think I kept you waiting long enough."

"Lean on me."

"You had better go on by yourself."

"Not for anything. As if I should leave you in this state."

"I thought I was taking care of you."

"And so you are. Keep up, *please*, a little longer," in great alarm, as he gave a sudden lurch to one side, and leant so heavily on her shoulder that she could scarcely stand upright.

Slowly, and with great difficulty, he dragged his feeble legs along the terrace; a double darkness, not born of the cloudy night, seemed to gather round him; and like a blind man he staggered on, anxious, above everything, that his companion should gain the shelter of the house unperceived before he finally succumbed. At the foot of the ornamental staircase he came to a standstill, and Ruby's heart sank within her. Slowly and solemnly, the stable-clock struck twelve. For a whole hour and a half she had been out in the cold night air; her teeth were chattering, her fingers almost numbed, but it was not of herself she was thinking, as Lord Alverley slipped down upon the lowest step, and bent his head with an involuntary groan.

"Shall I go and call for help?" she asked, in despair.

"No, I think I can manage it—if I crawl like a dog. You go first and open the window."

She opened the sash cautiously, pushed back the shutter, felt for her candlestick, which she had prudently left just inside with a box of matches, lighted the candle, and then turned round, both her little hands extended in eager assistance. He would not take them, but helped himself up by means of the balustrade, and finally by the frame of the window. At last, to Ruby's great relief, he was in the room, and leaning on chairs or tables that happened to come conveniently near; he reached the sofa, and dropped down upon it utterly exhausted. She stood over him for an instant with the candle in her hand, looking down at him with pity and interest in her gentle eyes. The light disclosed a pale refined face, with a long drooping moustache, and a figure slighter and shorter than that of his brother, though it looked less slender than it really was, wrapped in a thick shooting coat. The thin cheeks were so deathly white that she dropped down on her knees beside him, in a sudden panic.

"Can't I do anything for you?" she said, softly.

He opened his eyes slowly.

"There is a flask of brandy in one of my pockets."

"I will get it."

After a short search she managed to abstract it from its hiding-place, and put it to his lips; but it was no use. Passing her soft white arm behind his head, she tried again, with some success. A slight smile quivered round

his moustaches, and, with a deep sigh, his weary head slid down on to her shoulder.

Nothing broke the silence in the dimly-lighted room, but the ticking of a blue china clock upon the velvet-covered mantelpiece. Away down the passage she could hear the sound of voices, probably those of Lord Alverley's friends, hanging about the hall waiting for his return, but here all was still. Softly she pulled aside the folds of the handkerchief which covered the wounded arm, and shivered with horror when she saw a dark stain upon the sleeve of his coat. He was so intensely still, a terrible fear seized upon her heart lest he had bled to death.

"Do you feel very bad?" whispering, tremulously.

His voice was so faint that she could scarcely catch the answer.

"I feel as if I were going to die. Kiss me, dear, once—before I go."

His eyes were still closed, and there was scarcely a sign of life about the pallid face. Probably he was dreaming of his sister—it seemed inhuman to refuse.

Blushing to the hair on her forehead, yielding at once to terror and compassion, she stooped and put her lips gently to his cheek. Then the blue eyes opened slowly and looked earnestly into hers. "You have been very good to me; don't let them find you here."

"I wouldn't leave you for the world."

Selfish as Lord Alverley undoubtedly was, he thought of her now rather than of himself. The pain in his arm was acute, and he could only by a great effort retain possession of his faculties, and yet his mind was busied with anxieties for her in the midst of his pain.

"You must go," he said, as firmly as he could. "Ring the bell, which will bring them all trooping in, and then run for your life up the back stairs."

"Can't I do anything more for you?" as she slowly withdrew her supporting arm and let her head fall gently on the pillow.

"Yes, tell me your name," not at all too faint to make good use of his opportunities.

She said it very low, and he repeated it after her dreamily, "Ruby—Ruby St. Heliers."

"Look here," with sudden energy, as he tried to raise himself on his elbow, "if ever you want a friend, or—a husband, let me know."

"Thank you," she said, very gravely. "I thought you were going to die," and then she rang the bell.

"Stop one moment," stretching out his hand as she hurried across the room to a side door, "I—I want to be cured again."

Shaking her head, she opened it and passed through to the landing outside. There she waited till she heard Captain Marston burst into the room, followed by some others.

"We have been looking for you everywhere, old fellow, and couldn't conceive where you had hidden yourself."

Feeling sure that the patient would now be properly cared for, Ruby fled upstairs and never stopped till she was safe in her own bedroom. Shivering all over she threw herself down on the hearthrug and did her best to resuscitate the dying fire. A small flame rewarded her efforts, and she stretched out her poor numb hands towards it, wanting to get a little warmth into them before she went to bed. Her mind was too excited by the bewildering events of the evening to admit of sleep; but after reading the Psalms and Lessons for the day she felt more composed, and lay down to rest, supremely thankful to think that no one but Lord Alverley knew of her escapade.

It was well for her that she was in happy ignorance of the fact that the delicate little handkerchief with which she had wiped the dew from his brow when she thought that he was at the last gasp, was now resting in Captain Marston's pocket, that sharp-eyed officer having picked it up from the floor by Lord Alverley's side.

(To be continued.)

STRAYED AWAY.

CHAPTER LVI.

ON THE WAY TO REDEMPTION.

PERRY stayed only to make a few hurried preparations for departure, and then he went away; but not to Germany or to work. The elder Falkland rightly judged that, after his career of dissipation and excitement, the conscience-stricken man did not require the oppressive brain toil of superintending the contract at Hürse Cäsel or elsewhere. It was rest he wanted—rest and change of scene.

He went from England a haunted man—the dreadful picture of that poor, pale girl on the stones for ever before his eyes. He was an altered man—chastened by remorse, quieted by sorrow. He shunned the evil company that he had seen so much, too much of, until lately, and the old-time yearning for a good life came upon him once again. He thought of what his life might have been had Fanny been with him—the tranquil repose of the home of a working gentleman, with the sweet figure of his wife by the hearthstone, and little children playing at his knee. He saw what he had lost by want of moral courage, what he had caused by giving way to unjust doubt and unholy passion; and the reflection nearly drove him to despair.

Like a drunkard suddenly redeemed by strength of purpose—like a sinner changed in a moment by the grace of Heaven, and brought back to piety—he saw the abyss into which he had plunged, and trembled with the horror of the sin yet upon him, even while he repented. He might have gone on stultifying himself—seeking forgetfulness in fast life—drink and gaming, and worse, till quite lost, and swift death, or madness or imbecility came upon him; but when reflection came to him, he looked back in repentance, and saw all the evil he had done. The terrible lesson of his life was his redemption, but he wrung his hands when he thought what a price he had paid for it.

"I almost wish I were dead," he said, in agony, many and many a time. "I cannot think how I ever spoke such bitter words to my poor girl. She was so pure, so patient, so full of love for me, and she even sacrificed her life at last."

In those few days when first repentance came, he looked older by ten years. The builder's gentlemanly son would not have been easily recognized by friend or boon companion. There were deep lines in his face, furrows in his brow, and a few silver threads in his hair, and he looked delicate and thin, thoughtful and worn.

And he went away a wanderer, followed by the phantom that would not leave him. He saw it in his sleep. It was with him in his reveries; it came to him suddenly in the midst of other scenes—always the same sad beauty of that plaintive face upturned to the night sky—pained—placid—dead. It haunted him so that he was taught to pray Heaven to forgive him for having wronged her so, and he had strange fancies, in which he wondered whether, if he were to pray very earnestly, Fanny would be given back to him from the grave.

He went to Paris, but the city was too gay. He wanted quiet. He tried other cities, but they were all alike. He had to make his home at an hotel; hear the hateful talk of strangers, whose sole business was pleasure. He could get no repose—such as he wanted.

Then he returned to England, but not to London. He sought a sequestered inland town, where he would not be bored by the too familiar sight of grand hotels, silken company, and glittering dinner tables. He was sick of the small Balsazzars, and the feasts that were Balsazzar-like, except for the writing on the wall. His shattered nerves and agonized heart made him sick of everything that was not peaceful.

It is strange to see how the most hardened men turn when in suffering to the religion they neglect when they need no solace—how they cling to it while the suffering lasts, as the sick man clings to the doctor, whom he forgets to pay when health is restored. Percy purchasing some fancy articles in a shop where the pious press held its place, with small extravagancies in the way of pretty, useless trifles, read a few lines in an article on the first page of a religious paper—wanted to read more, so bought the paper, and took it with him.

Probably in the whole course of his lifetime, except when at school or college, he had never read more than a stray chapter of the Bible. He thought the study of religion a good thing for women and children, but rather a weakness in men. Until he was tried in the crucible of soul pain he did not know how much solace there was in the glory of the Creed.

He read the journal through, from the first page to the last, and it gave a new tone to his mind. It soothed him, gave him a better and more peaceful state of feeling; it turned his thoughts into himself, and showed him what he might have become for bad—what he might yet be for good. And on the last page he saw this:

"A home is offered on moderate terms to a gentleman of Christian principles.—Address the Reverend Mr. Wilson, Caswell, Westmoreland."

"In the house of a clergyman," he meditated, "I should find peace there. Learn, perhaps, to be a good man, if he came to know me and had patience; and I wonder if he will, when he knows what a wretched, world-worn thing I am."

He acted on the good resolution at once. He would not wait to send a letter, fearing that in the interval of delay other letters might be sent and another chosen. There were other advertisements of the same kind, but he set his mind on this one.

He went down to Caswell, and found the house easily. A little girl directed him, for the Reverend Mr. Wilson was known to children, as good men are. It was a pretty Gothic house, with the village church by its side; a range of fertile meadowland in front, and God's quiet acres behind. It was altogether a place of rest.

"Yes," he said, as he stood under the porch, the green leaves and the perfume of jessamine and twining roses on the trellis-work each side of him, "there is the sweetness of repose here."

The door was opened by a servant, whose calm and cheerful countenance told of kindly treatment in the household. Her very voice was different from the voice of other servants; no nervousness, no trouble in it, as she asked,—

"Who did you please to want, sir?"

"The Reverend Mr. Wilson."

"Will you step in, please?"

"Thanks."

The girl ushered him into a cosy room on the left hand of the house—an old fashioned apartment, with heavy curtains, heavy furniture, and some rich oil paintings on the walls. There was a store of books in well-preserved vellum binding—books of the past—books of the present—books of the courtly days of Addison and Steele, and books of the time when Sir Walter Scott cast a new spell over the literature of the world—books selected by a scholar, every one.

Percy was amusing himself with one of those things seen in the days of our grandmothers—an album of varieties—scraps of verse, rare and curious flowers, feathers of birds, small engravings; sketches in oil, water, pencil, and pen and ink, birthday impromptus, &c., when Mr. Wilson came in, fresh from the garden evidently, for he put his spade on the mat outside, and a pair of leather gloves on a table in the hall—a quiet, unaffected gentleman, with the instinct of his sacred calling strong within him.

"Mr. Wilson?" said Percy, encouraged by the smile that greeted him.

"Yes."

Percy handed the reverend gentleman his card.

"I saw an advertisement respecting a home—such a home as I want and feel I should like."

"And so you came down," smiled the clergyman. "Well, I daresay we shall agree. My housekeeper will arrange the terms with you, and we had better see how we get on together for a month."

"I think I could stay for ever," said Percy, with a deep sigh. "I have not seen a place so quiet within my recollection. You will require references?"

The minister looked him up and down.

"No. I take you in good faith, and if you deceive me the sin is yours, not mine."

Percy bowed.

"When shall I see the housekeeper?"

"Mrs. Morton will conduct you to your rooms presently. During your stay here you will consider yourself one of the family."

"With pleasure."

"We have prayers at eight in the morning, and in the evening we have readings, in which you can take part if you care to. There is the Bible—and he laid his hand upon the great book on the table—"and there are the stories told by the men whom the Bible taught to write; for it is one of my fancies," he added, with a smile, "that the Book has been the chief teacher of literature, the creator of poet, historian, and novelist."

"It never occurred to me," said Percy; "for I regret to say, I have not been a deep thinker; but I can easily agree with you now."

"Yes, in my impression, it inspired Milton, taught Byron to write 'Childe Harold,' gave us the glowing pages of Walter Scott, the tender pathos and gentle satire of Dickens, the exquisite depth and kindly humour of Thackeray; and Shakespeare was no heathen player, or he could not have given us an Ophelia and a Desdemona, or such sweet creatures as Cordelia and Rosalind."

"You have not made the Scripture your sole study, Mr. Wilson?"

"All these are Scripture indirectly, Mr. Falkland; rivers of human divinity from the sacred ocean."

"I am glad I came here," said Percy, taking his hand. "I am a child as yet in the way I should like to go; and I shall not find too stern a teacher."

"Do you require teaching?"

"Very sadly."

"Well, then, you have Heaven, and this book, and nature; and my humble efforts, under grace, are at your service most earnestly."

The Reverend Mr. Wilson saw what kind of man he had to deal with, and he did his spiritizing gently. He rang for the housekeeper, and she conducted Percy to his room—a small apartment with a snowy bed, white curtains at the window, green trees waving outside, and the pure breath of country air coming in.

"I want to arrange terms," said Percy, taking out his purse, "if you will tell me, please."

He was himself surprised at the change that had come over him—the gentleness with which he spoke.

The terms were moderate for a gentleman of means—eight pounds a month for everything. He placed a five-pound note and three sovereigns on the table, and then felt that for a month at least that quiet home was his.

CHAPTER LVII.

BY THE BEDSIDE.

WHEN Percy was gone, the elder Falkland remembered his instructions, and, out of respect for the sorrow of his son and for the misery caused to the Wests, he proceeded to act upon them. He instructed his solicitor, Mr. Bradley, to see West, and offer him the two thousand pounds on condition of emigrating.

He did not take Bradley too deeply into his confidence. The marriage of his son with Fanny was still a sore point with him; it was

known to few as yet, and he did not wish the few to increase.

"The girl dead," Falkland thought, "and the whole family out of the way. Percy will come back and marry a lady, as he ought to have done at first."

The solicitor was naturally curious to know why such an immense sum of money was to be offered to a working family, and Falkland made a desperate effort to tell him.

"You see, they had a daughter," he said, abruptly—"a girl who got into trouble with my son—and she drowned herself. That's the whole of it; and I want to make the poor people some recompense."

The lawyer was a man of the world, and the incident was commonplace enough to him. He had arranged a great many delicate matters of that kind, but he had not dealt with the parents of girls who drowned themselves, or with men who paid so liberally as Falkland did. In his experience, girls did not drown themselves. The broken heart lived on content with a small income, till it grew worldly and reckless with the rest; and if the good life turned into an evil one, the girl herself was to blame. Such is the philosophy of man in reference to womankind.

"I had better see this Mr. West in person," said Bradley. "Will he come here, or shall I go to him?"

"I had rather you went to him. The fact is, the poor girl is now lying dead, and I want to be as kind as I can to the people. Tell them they shall have thousand pounds to start with, and the second thousand when they arrive out. They must go to the colonies."

"Or America, I suppose?"

"No. America is not far enough away. They must go to Australia, or somewhere like that. The money will be placed in your hands, Bradley, and I leave you to deal with them."

Mr. Bradley dealt with them by going that same day to the terrace in Camberwell to see the carpenter. The blinds were down and the house was quiet. The lawyer felt for those poor people whose life had care enough in its toil without the sorrow of seeing their children led astray. He asked to see Mr. West alone, and Mr. West saw him in the parlour, with its neat furniture and the piano, on which still stood a vase of faded flowers gathered from the garden and placed there in their bloom by Fanny.

"I am instructed by Mr. Falkland to make an arrangement with you," said the lawyer, going to the point at once, and glad that he had that subdued old man to deal with instead of some revolutionary, independent Briton, such as he had drawn in his imagination; "he wishes to make you a handsome recompense."

"Yes, I've heard of that before," said old Bill, bitterly. "It was 'recompense' when they took my child away; recompense when she came back again, with shame and sorrow on her pretty face; recompense and recompense for everything—as if such recompense could give her back to me."

Mr. Bradley heard him through in silence. It was not his business to discuss the *morale* of the case; he had simply to make an offer of money.

"Mr. Falkland thinks you would do better in the Colonies," he went on. "He suggests—"

"I daresay, and much obliged to him. He would like to get us out of the way, and have it all forgotten. Thank you all the same, sir, but we don't want his recompense nor his advice. What's done can't be undone; and we have got to bear it."

"Hear me out, please," said the solicitor. "He regrets as deeply as you do that the sad affair had such an unhappy termination. You are, of course, aware that you have no claim upon him?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know," was the sad reply. "I was a good and faithful servant to him for more than thirty years. I've nursed Master Percy many a time when his father used to live at the house in the yard,

and I never thought they would serve me like this."

"It is hard to bear; but Mr. Falkland desires to lighten the burden as much as he can. You have a large family, Mr. West."

"No more than I can keep, please the Lord."

"You have sons."

"The best lads going—sensible and strong enough to hold their own anywhere."

"Well, then, see what a good thing it would be for them if, instead of remaining here in England, where work is always uncertain, you emigrated to the Colonies, where you can have forty acres of land for each of them, and a grant of, perhaps, two hundred for yourself, with the money Mr. Falkland proposes to give you. What do you think of a thousand pounds, Mr. West?"

It was a sum Mr. West had never dreamed of possessing, and he pondered over it. He knew what a help it would be to the boys; but he clung to the old land that he knew so well—the localities in which his children had been born and reared.

"A thousand pounds to start with," said Mr. Bradley, wondering that the carpenter did not close eagerly with an offer which must, to him, have appeared magnificent; "and a second thousand when you are settled, as you may require it. With such a sum, Mr. West, and the help of your stalwart sons, it will be your own fault if, in five years, you are not a rich and independent man."

"It would be a good thing for the boys," said old Bill; "and if they went, we should all go, for I shouldn't like to part with them I neither would missus."

"And you must admit, Mr. West, that, considering the elder Mr. Falkland was in no way to blame for the wrong committed, he treats you in a very generous spirit."

"Yes, sir. He does his best, and it's more than I expected of him; and somehow, since this thing's happened, I don't care so much for England as I used to. I used to think I should like to live and die in Lambeth; and then when I came here I never wanted to move again. But the neighbours got to know, and I don't like to be looked at going in and coming out."

"A very natural feeling, Mr. West; one that does you credit. Then I may tell Mr. Falkland that you accept his offer, and are prepared to start soon?"

"Yes, sir. If we go at all, it may as well be soon. There's the boys to be taken from their situations, and Bill to resign the fire-escape; and, altogether, it might be done in a month."

"Then, Mr. West, a thousand pounds will be placed at your credit—a cheque-book supplied you for the London and Colonial Bank."

"What does that mean, sir?"

"It means that you will have a letter of credit from the London branch, so that when you arrive out you can draw the money just as if you were here. Of course, you would not think of taking such an immense sum with you on board an emigrant ship, at the risk of being robbed of it."

"No, sir, I like the other way best. And tell Mr. Falkland, please, that I don't bear him any ill will, and that I hope Mr. Percy will be sorry for the wrong he done me, and be a better man for it."

"I will tell him all you say, Mr. West."

"Thank you, sir."

"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," said old Bill, holding out his brown hand, which Mr. Bradley, out of respect to the two thousand, just touched with his delicate fingers. "I should like to be more grateful, if I could; but, you see, I can't help thinking of the poor girl."

The solicitor went away, reflecting. He had looked at the poor so long, from the poor but honest point of view, that he was surprised to see an almost worn-out working man think more of his child than such a sum of money.

"I have known a father sell his child, a husband sell his wife for less," he said; "and here is a working man, who would rather be

poor with his daughter than rich without her."

By a curious circumstance—a delicacy on the lawyer's part, and a reluctance on West's to say more than was necessary of the matter—it was not mentioned that Fanny still lived. Each had spoken of her in such terms as left anyone, who thought her dead, open to retain the impression; so, when Bradley went to Falkland, to tell him the result, and Falkland said,—"The girl is really dead?" Bradley answered,—"Yes," in perfect faith.

"It is a large sum to give for Percy's folly," said Falkland. "But the money will be his ultimately, and he is only making just reparation. It will be a long time before he is a happy man."

When old Bill told his family what had occurred, they were delighted, and the elder Falkland came in for much praise. They had the justice to see that the builder was doing his best to atone for Percy's wrong.

"There's nothing I should like better," said young Bill, "if Susan would go with me. But if she won't go, I don't."

"That's wrong, Bill," said West. "If your cousin Sue cares for you, you could not have a better way of trying her. A girl who loves a man will go with him anywhere and everywhere. Stay at home, and you will only be a fireman, with a pound or thirty shillings a week all your lifetime; go abroad, and you will be a rich farmer, with your own sheep and oxen, and a horse to ride. If Sue isn't selfish, she will marry, and go with you."

"But if Sue would rather have me at home on a pound a week, be content?"

"It's a good feeling so far as it goes, but it don't go far. A pound a week won't keep a family of children, and that's to be thought of."

"You are right, father; that's the way to look at it."

And so Bill made up his mind to go with Susan, or without her.

Arthur was at home with his mother in Paxton-street when Mrs. Wilson received a letter from Mrs. West, informing her of what had taken place. The spelling was bad, and the letter was written with thick ink and a brittle steel pen, but the pathos of the mother's heart shone throughout.

Mrs. West wrote at Fanny's request. Poor Fanny yearned to have her kindly friend near her in this hour of need. She felt that the calm power of Mrs. Wilson would give strength to her, and she wanted the clasp of that kind hand in her own. She wanted the quiet earnestness of voice that always reassured her.

"Write to Mrs. Wilson, mother," Fanny had said, faintly, when Mrs. West made her first visit. "She was so kind to me, and I should so much like to see her."

So Mrs. West wrote to the best of her ability. She had never had much time for reading or writing since she married. She had never known what it was to be without a baby in the house, and the only literature she could indulge in was *Lloyd's paper*, which Bill West read to her through his spectacles every Sunday morning.

It was, perhaps, twenty years since Mrs. West had taken her pen in hand, and in twenty years her spelling and calligraphy had not improved; yet the tender soul spoke in the scratched and spattered writing and the broken syllables:—

"DEAR MRS. WILSON,—

"My poor Fanny, who is in the hospital, asked me to write to you before you to come and see her. I needn't tell you that her trouble was about Mr. Percy Falkland, because you no it, but she had a letter from him, and when she had it she went out and tried to commit suicide in the river, because her poor heart was broken, poor girl, and I hope Heaven will forgive him, though I must not say a word against him, for though he's broken her heart she loves

him as much as ever, which we who have husbands of our own can feel for her; so, if you will, please to come. From your grateful and obedient servant, 'CANONIZING WEST.'

Mrs. Wilson read that letter, and if she smiled, it was not at the writing, but in sad sympathy with the writer. She would not tell Arthur yet; he was so happy in his new-found joy.

She took a cab, and went to Camberwell. Mrs. West opened the door to her. Arthur's mother took the poor old lady in her arms, and kissed her in kindly pity.

"We must go and see our darling," she said, "and take baby to her. Is this the day?"

Mrs. West sobbed an affirmative. Arthur's mother could have cried too, but she felt that her own strength of soul was needed to support the untaught, humble woman who could not so well bear the trial. Mrs. Wilson said but little, though she felt much more than she could say, as yet.

She knew better than they did the ordeal that Fanny would have to go through when she recovered; and she meant to save her from it, if possible. The simple-minded carpenter and wife were not aware that Fanny, by attempting suicide, had made herself amenable to the law.

They went to the hospital in Mrs. Wilson's cab; old Bill West carrying baby, and Mrs. Wilson keeping the hand of Fanny's mother locked in hers all the way. Some talismanic influence on the doctor's widow's part gained so large a party admission to the patient. Doctor Wilson had been well known and respected at the institution, and his widow was received with every courtesy.

The kindly house-surgeon took care to have the ward cleared when they entered, and there was no interruption to the sad interview. Mrs. Wilson's heart ached when she went to the bedside; and, lifting Fanny's head to her breast, said,—

"Frances, my poor girl—my darling!"

She spoke the more tenderly, for, having exchanged a few words in private with the surgeon, and he had told her that, though they had done their best, the poor girl was not out of danger yet.

The little group by the bedside saw it when Fanny stretched out her faint arms for her baby. The stricken heart was well-nigh broken, and she felt that death would have been a mercy.

M A D. M E G.

CHAPTER VIII.—(continued.)

In the early dawn of Christmas Day, when the Court was wrapped in profound silence—for the revellers had either taken their departure or had succumbed to their potions, and were slumbering peacefully beneath the tables in the great hall—the figure of a woman, closely muffled and hooded, came creeping with stealthy steps down the broad oaken staircase, then threaded her way gingerly through the debris of broken glass and overturned chairs. Once or twice she started nervously as a loud snore proceeded from some obscure corner; and her teeth chattered, her limbs trembled so much that several times she had to steady herself by grasping some piece of furniture. At a door which led from the right she paused, hesitated, then finally turned the handle, and glided in. As she did so, a ray of light fell salient a face ghastly in its awful pallor, and wide eyes filled with an untold horror.

CHAPTER IX.

AND LAST.

"WHAT a perfect Christmas Day!" cried Kitty Leigh, as she danced across the room to the window, and gazed out rapturously on the snow-covered earth, the purity of which had not yet been defiled.

The breakfast-room at the Cedars was at the

back of the house, and looked out into the garden. Mrs. Leigh was carefully measuring the tea from the caddy, and Kitty was too absorbed in her contemplation of some red-breasted robins, to whom it was her custom to throw bread crumbs each morning, to heed a knock at the hall-door. Fitz, however, who was at that moment descending the staircase in slippers, heard it, and, with a sudden impulse for which he could never account, hastened to admit the unexpected visitor himself, wondering a little who it could possibly be. As he flung open the door, to his no small surprise a lady staggered forward, holding out both hands towards him imploringly.

"Oh save me! save me! Fitz," she cried, with a half sob, and then she would have fallen but that a strong arm was thrown hastily round her and drew her in. Then the door was closed softly behind her; and Fitz Leigh, lifting his burden as though it had been a mere feather-weight, strode across the hall, pushed open his study door, and entered. He had recognized the voice, though he had not seen the face until now—now when her bonnet fell back, and gently loosened the strings; and removing it altogether gazed into the colourless features of his some-time love.

There was a bright fire burning in the grate, and a comfortable couch near it; but Fitz could not resist the temptation of holding Clarice in his arms for a minute longer, of pressing her to his heart passionately, of looking his full at the closed eyelids, with their long fringes, that swept the pale, olive cheek of the girl who was lost to him for ever. For one mad, delicious moment he did not remember that; he forgot that she was as completely severed from him as if she were thousands of miles away, and, stooping, he laid his lips on the pale brow. The action recalled him to himself. A hot flush welled up to his cheeks, and with a bitter pang he gently laid Clarice on the couch. Even then he could not tear himself away, but stood sorrowfully noting how haggard and wan the face he loved best on earth had grown! how the blue veins showed through the transparent skin! how loosely the rings hung on the thin, white hand!

"Fitz! Fitz!"

It was Kitty's voice calling him, and he started guiltily. Actuated by that same strange impulse that had moved him before he crossed the room, quickly passed out, turning the key in the lock.

"Oh! I did not know you were down," Kitty said, surprised. "We have been waiting breakfast for you. Why, Fitz"—as he followed, and after a brief salutation to his mother stood on the hearthring, making no attempt to take his seat—"how strange you look!"

"Are you not well?" asked Mrs. Leigh, anxiously, her attention called to him by Kitty's surprised exclamation.

"Well! Yes," Fitz answered, with some of his old brusqueness. "What a fuss you womenkind make about a trifl! The fact is—I may be very foolish—but can you keep a secret?"

Both ladies answered in the affirmative.

"Well, I must trust you then. Clarice—Lady Haughton—is in my study, and I think—I can hardly explain my reasons for the surmise—she is in some kind of trouble. At any rate, I am sure that until she can explain matters it would be as well to keep the servants in ignorance of her advent. And, mother," turning to Mrs. Leigh, "will you go to her? She has fainted, I think."

The good women's kind sympathy was quickly aroused, and waiting to learn no more she hurried off, leaving Kitty in a maze of wonder. To her Fitz briefly explained what had occurred.

"But what makes you think there is need for secrecy?" his sister naturally questioned.

"I cannot tell, but I have a presentiment that such is the case. The very fact of her coming here at all, at this time, proves there is something wrong at home. She will tell us all, no doubt, when she regains consciousness." But in that Fitz was mistaken, for when Lady

Haughton opened those dark unfathomable eyes of hers there was no recognition in their depths. Fitz went for a doctor, an old college friend of his, to whom he represented Clarice as a young relative. Kitty remained in close attendance on her friend; and as she was suffering herself from a feverish cold, and the servants rarely entered Fitz's study, they had no suspicion that a stranger was in the house.

All through that day and night Lady Haughton lay either in a semi-stupor or in the throes of delirium, and it was not until the next morning that light was thrown on Clarice's conduct from a most unexpected quarter. Opening the *Daily Telegraph* Fitz's eyes were riveted on the heading of a column in bold, clear type: "Terrible Tragedy at Craig Court. Murder of the Earl of Haughton. Strange Disappearance of the Countess." The details were meagre enough. Nothing beyond the fact that a dinner had been given to his tenantry, in honour of the earl and countess's return from their honeymoon, and that early on Christmas morning his lordship had been discovered in his own room stabbed to the heart. Then followed later particulars. The police, who had been hastily summoned, had discovered a handkerchief steeped in blood lying near the earl, and bearing his wife's initials. This, coupled with the damning fact of the countess's mysterious disappearance, pointed to her as the guilty party. Her maid going to her lady's room on Christmas morning had found it tenantless, and one of the carousers of the previous evening could swear that he had been awoken by a noise, and had seen someone pass stealthily through the hall while he was yet too confused by the effect of the night's libations to know the hour, or to be able to recognize the person.

Fitz Leigh's face grew pale, and the hand which held the paper trembled as he read. Yet never in his heart did it occur to him to suspect Clarice. There was some terrible mystery which she could explain, he was convinced of that, but until she was able to do so it was best to keep her hiding-place secret. How thankful he was now that he had taken precautions to do so, urged by some unaccountable presentiment of impending danger to the girl!

Soon the journals were all filled with the same ghastly story. Speculations and conjectures were rife. The countess's whereabouts was being eagerly sought by detectives from Scotland-yard. People shook their heads, and the wise ones declared they had always known no good could result from such an alliance.

It was an anxious time for those at the Cedars; for when at last the fever abated, and the countess began to show signs of returning health, she made no allusion to the past. On the contrary, she showed such an evident aversion to the mention of anything connected with her husband and Craig Court that her friends were both surprised and puzzled.

"Of course she is innocent; we are sure of that," Mrs. Leigh said to her son one day. "But it goes to my heart to see her sitting there with that hopeless, stricken look upon her face! Whatever is the cause she is suffering terribly, and I do wish she could be induced to speak."

"Do you think she could bear to be told of the earl's death? That might lead her to break through her reserve!" Fitz said, hesitatingly.

Mrs. Leigh shook her head.

"At any rate I do not feel equal to undertake the task, neither would Kitty be, but perhaps you—"

"I!" Fitz cried, aghast. He had not seen Clarice since the day he had carried her unconscious into his study. It would be an ordeal, he had told himself, whenever they did meet; but how could he trust himself to break to the woman he loved the news of her husband's death?

"Well!" said Mrs. Leigh, interrogatively, finding that after that first exclamation her son remained silent.

"I could not do it," he said, hurriedly. "At least that is—I must think about it."

And the result was that in the end he decided that it would be the best for him to see Clarice and endeavour, at any rate, to obtain from her some clue as to her reason for leaving Craig Court.

Her place of concealment might be discovered any day, and, being a barrister, he would be better able to refute any charge brought against her if he took this opportunity of gleaning knowledge from the countess's own lips. It was now the second week in January, and no further light had been thrown on the manner in which the earl had met his death, though the most absurd and improbable rumours were afloat; and, as might be supposed, the countess's continued absence played a prominent part in the unlikely stories that were spread by the lovers of sensation.

There were those who did not scruple to assert that she, too, as well as her husband had fallen a victim to some foul conspiracy; others believed that having rid herself of the earl she had fled with a former lover; whilst again there was a theory that she had committed suicide in a fit of remorse, and that the dark waters of the mere in the deer park held the secret of her disappearance.

All this and much more had reached Fitz Leigh's ears; and now, having resolved what was to be done, he did not delay in putting his plans into execution, and the next day after his conversation with his mother he entered, unannounced, into the countess's presence.

If he had thought that she looked ill before he was unutterably shocked at the change which illness and something else—could it be remorse?—had caused in her appearance now. Dark circles surrounded her eyes, which were unnaturally bright and restless, with a strange mournfulness in their depths he had never seen there before. There were lines of care and suffering on the once smooth brow, a nervous tremulousness around the mouth. As Fitz paused her glance turned towards him, and then a wave of colour crept to her cheeks, receding instantly, and leaving her more deathly pale, if that were possible. She twisted her hands together, and—was it fancy?—or did she after that first involuntary glance avoid meeting his gaze, even appear to shrink from him as he came forward and took her feeble, trembling hands in his?

"Clarice!" he said, softly, unconsciously using her Christian name—"my poor Clarice!"

"Don't!" she cried, snatching her hands from him, and there was no mistaking how she recoiled from him now.

He took no notice of the action, but drawing a chair forward sat down beside her. There was a little silence, then Fitz spoke again.

"I do not know," he said, "whether you are strong enough to bear all that I would say, but it is time that at least some portion of the mystery surrounding you were cleared up."

Again the countess shivered and drew herself further away from him.

"Of course," Fitz went on, seeing that she made no effort to speak, "we have all respected your silence, and even now I would not force your confidence; but since you have been lying ill some things have occurred at Craig Court which it has become incumbent that you should know."

"At Craig Court!" she repeated, giving him a startled look.

"Yes! I hardly know how to tell you. There has been a terrible tragedy enacted there."

"A terrible tragedy!"

It seemed as though she could but reiterate his words.

"In fact," Fitz said, unable to beat about the bush longer, "Lord Haughton has been fully murdered!"

He was looking straight at her now, and she met his gaze undinchingly. Something—was it relief?—made her draw a long breath.

"How did it happen? Tell me all, for

need not fear for me," she said then, calmly, and she listened attentively while he repeated the facts.

"And have they caught the murderer? Do they know who has committed the deed?" she questioned, as he finished.

"No; the assassin is still at large, Clarice," bending suddenly forward. "Will you tell me now why you left the Court?"

The old nervous fear came back to her eyes, a shudder passed through her veins.

"I cannot," she said, brokenly, turning her head away. "Be satisfied to know that I had very excellent reasons for doing so."

"But you must tell me, Clarice," Fitz said, firmly.

"Must!"

There was the old sparkle in her eyes as she turned like one at bay, but before she could say another word there came a light rap at the door, followed by the immediate entrance of a couple of policemen. Whilst yet Clarice was regarding them with mingled alarm and astonishment, one of them stepped to her side.

"You are the Countess of Haughton?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes!" she answered, haughtily. "What do you want with me?"

"I have a warrant here for your arrest, under the suspicion of your having murdered your husband, the late Earl of Haughton."

"Will they hang her?"

The words were hissed rather than spoken, and there was so much malice, such thirst for blood depicted in the tones, that the person addressed turned, and regarded the interlocutor curiously.

A dark, weird-looking old woman, with bent figure, long, grey, straggling locks and boney hands, and with evil sinister eyes, stood beside him.

"I should think not," he said, coolly, after examining his neighbour critically. "She has a clever fellow defending her, and it seems impossible that one so young and beautiful could commit such a crime. They will try to prove an *alibi*."

"What's that?" sharply.

"Why, that she wasn't in the house when the murder was committed."

"But she was—she was! She hated him like poison, and she'd good cause," Mad Meg whispered, hoarsely.

"Ah! you seem to be interested in this case. Knew the family, perhaps?" questioned the other, giving her a side glance.

"Aye, aye, they're a bad lot. Oh! but I'd like to see her hanged!"

There was so much vindictiveness in the speech that the listener could not doubt the sincerity of her words. They were standing outside the office of the *Evening Standard*, where a little group had gathered anxious to see the last edition containing a report of the great criminal trial that had that day commenced.

The old woman, having gained all the information she could, hobbled off; but the stranger, who happened to be no other than Fitz Leigh's head clerk, touched a policeman, and whispered something to him that had the effect of causing that individual to follow and keep his eye on Meg. He was close behind her, when she suddenly crossed the road, stumbled, and for the second time in her life was run over.

As on the former occasion she was quickly raised, and under the policeman's supervision she was at once conveyed to Charing Cross Hospital.

That night she died, but not before she had made a full and ample confession, and acknowledged herself the murderer of the Earl of Haughton. And it was only when her depositions were read before the judge that Fitz Leigh learnt the cause of Clarice's flight from Craig Court.

It appeared that, many years previously, Lord Haughton had wooed and betrayed a beautiful gipsy girl. Meg's threats of ven-

geance when she discovered the relationship which had existed between the profligate nobleman and her daughter gave place to wild entreaties and pathetic prayers, when she found one day that she was missing. The earl disclaimed all knowledge of her whereabouts, but the old woman stoutly maintained that he had decoyed her away, and secreted her somewhere; and it was probable she would have wreaked summary vengeance on Lord Haughton had she not been withheld from doing so by the knowledge that she would thus lose the only chance of finding the clue to her daughter's place of concealment.

So the years had sped by, and vainly had Meg searched for her missing child from one end of the country to the other until she had grown distraught with grief. When the earl had married her, frenzy had broken loose, and she had planned a double crime.

That evening, when the woman, beneath whose charge she had been placed, believing her asleep, had left her to join in the merriment below, she had crept to the countess's apartments, having long ago made herself acquainted with every nook and crevice in the Court, where at one time she had believed her daughter was confined.

She was familiar with a secret mode of access through another room to Lady Haughton's chamber. Then into the horrified ears of Clarice she had poured her tale declaring that the earl was wedded to her daughter, who was still living, but secreted by her husband.

It never occurred to the countess to doubt Meg's story. Had she not noticed the earl's agitation on recognizing her? Here was a reason for his so evidently wishing this woman out of the way! She was dishonoured! no wife at all! And as this dreadful truth flashed upon her mind she determined to fly from the place, while yet she was at liberty to do so.

Her father and mother were abroad with Bee, who had been ill during the winter, and she formed a hasty resolution to go to the Leights. She had acted as in a dream; but when the full horror of her position forced itself on her she had shrunk from making known her wrongs. How could she tell Fitz that she was—an, Heaven! what? Better even death than to fall so low in his eyes, and so she had kept an obstinate silence.

Mad Meg, with diabolical cunning, having worked on the countess's feelings, had, after watching her departure, gone in search of the earl, whom she had found lying in a drunken stupor still dressed, on his bed. She had stabbed him to the heart, and then, dipping a handkerchief she had abstracted from the countess's room in his blood, had left it near him, thus, as she believed, wreaking a double vengeance—on the seducer of her daughter, and on the hapless girl whom she regarded as the usurper of her lawful place. Then she had crept back to her own room, and had for many days feigned an illness that kept her to her bed, thus effectually preventing any suspicion resting on her.

"And you could not trust me?" Fitz said, reproachfully.

They were alone—Clarice and he—in the cozy drawing-room at the Cedars. Mrs. Leigh and Kitty, having guessed pretty well how matters stood, had discreetly retired.

"It was not that," Clarice answered, in a tremulous, sweet voice, as new as it was delicious for her companion to hear. "And even now—"

"Now—what new horrors is my darling conjuring up?" Fitz questioned, tenderly.

"We are not certain that Mad Meg told the truth when she was dying. Perhaps, after all, she was right when she assured me that the earl, with a slight shudder, 'did marry her daughter.'"

"And if it were so?"

"Oh, Fitz, don't you understand? I could not marry you then," distressfully.

"Why not?" he questioned, coolly. "I know, darling, what you would say," he continued,

stroking caressingly the dark shimmering braids of hair. "But that would be no obstacle with me, and surely not with you if you loved me? And do you love me, Clarice?"

No need to answer that question in words; the dark eyes raised to his were eloquent with deep feeling, but still she was not satisfied.

"I wish—" she began.

"Clarice, my love," Fitz broke in, earnestly, "a mistake has separated us once, and nearly ruined both our lives; do not let any mistrust set us now. No one in the wide world, except you and myself, ever had a doubt as to the earl's marriage with you being perfectly legal. We may never ascertain the real truth now, and even if it were to turn out as you fear it would make no difference to me. You will always be in my eyes a pure and perfect woman; more sinned against than sinning."

And so Clarice's last scruple was banished, and she could give herself up to a happiness all the greater and sweeter for the suffering through which she had passed.

A year later there was a quiet wedding in a London church, and this time the bride and bridegroom were of a suitable age, and people said it was a real love-match, and the rank and position was on the lady's side.

It was during their honeymoon in Paris that Fitz one morning received a letter which, having read, he passed to his wife. The following is an extract:

"We have succeeded at length in tracing the girl, Susan Leatherhead, Mad Meg's daughter, and have ascertained from her own lips that she was never married to Lord Haughton. She has been confined in a private lunatic asylum for the last twelve years, and died a few days ago of rapid consumption. There is no reason to doubt her statement made when she knew herself to be beyond all hope of recovery. It is hardly necessary to add that she was in reality, so far as we had an opportunity of judging, perfectly sane, and the earl had defrayed the expenses of her maintenance."

And so the last doubt was removed. Clarice's eyes were full of tears as she raised them to her husband's.

"Poor girl!" she murmured, softly.

"I knew you would never feel quite satisfied," he said, tenderly, "unless I could set your mind at ease on this subject, and so I employed a detective to ferret out the girl, and he advertised, offering a reward of £500 for any information respecting her, living or dead, with what result you see."

Clarice raised his hand, and laid her lips lovingly upon it.

"How good you are to me!" she whispered.

"I have to make up to you for so much suffering, darling!" he answered. "I shall always think that if I had only spoken that night, Clarice, do you remember? What would your answer have been?"

"I think I loved you from the first, Fitz; only I did not know it," she acknowledged, shamefacedly.

"And I was a brute not to understand. But what a tease you were, Clarice, and I was jealous, too!"

"Jealous!" with wide open eyes of surprise.

"Yes, insufferably, horribly jealous of that cousin, Ralph Morrison. Clarice, are you sure you never cared for him?"

"Ah! that reminds me," Clarice said, not heeding his question. "I have had a letter from Kitty this morning. Your news made me forget mine. Marriages, it would seem, are a sort of epidemic just now."

"Why, surely Kitty is not dreaming of committing such folly? I never even heard of a possible suitor."

"Oh, brothers are proverbially blind to their sisters' charms," Clarice said, lightly. "Kitty, it seems, has met with some one who appreciates her as she deserves."

"And that is?"

"My cousin, Ralph Morrison. Are you jealous now, sir?"

[THE END.]

TWICE WOODED.

KATHERINE stood by the low, carved mantelpiece, gazing absently, sadly, into the glowing fire.

One shapely jewelled hand rested on the dark wood, and the other held back the sweeping folds of her dead-leaf coloured silk.

This sombre toilet was relieved by delicate pink coral ornaments in her ears, and at throat and wrists, and a coral comb fastened back the masses of waving hair, dead-leaf coloured, like her silken robe.

The pretty clock chimed once, twice; it was half-past eleven, nearly midnight now, and she had been waiting there alone so many hours.

A quick, firm step outside, and the sound of a latchkey brought her hand to her heart, and then she turned; but a shade of disappointment crossed her fair brow as a tall, slight young fellow entered, and hastened to her side.

"Still waiting, Kate! Always waiting! Is my brother late again?"

"He is late again, Arthur. But how pale you are. Are you ill? tired?"

"Oh, no. I have walked rapidly. Is your clock right?"

"Yes. It has just struck half-past. Hadn't you better go upstairs to rest?"

"And leave you here alone? No. If you must sit up I will too. What a pretty ring you wear! May I look at it closer?"

She held out her hand for him to examine the delicate coral carving.

As he stood beside her, bending over it, neither heard the door open, nor saw a dark, scowling-faced man approach them; so that both started when a sarcastic tone fell on their ears.

"A most engaging tableau! What is the interpretation, pray? The meaning seems obscure."

"I was examining your wife's ring, Guy. I came in a moment ago, and finding her alone again I remained with her. As you are come, I will bid you both good-night."

He bowed and left, and then followed a stormy scene.

Kate never could account for these sad quarrels. An innocent word or look from her was enough to start one, and the tempest once started there seemed no calming it.

She said,

"You are late again, Guy."

"No one asked you to wait," he growled.

"I would rather wait," she answered, gently; "for I am always anxious when you are not in at your usual time."

"This is my usual time."

"Yes, I know it has grown to be so," she replied, sadly; but it did not use to be. "Guy," she added, laying her hand timidly on his arm, "couldn't you come back to me a little earlier sometimes?"

Then his anger burst forth, and from one thing he went on to another, until, forgetting himself utterly, he stormily accused her of amusing herself well in his absence.

"What do I find on my return, night after night?" he cried. "You, my wife, in gorgeous dresses which I pay for, and that baby-faced brother of mine almost kneeling at your feet!"

"Guy," she moaned, pressing her hands together in pain as his unjust words stung her heart, "I dress for you—only you; and your brother is—"

"Silence, madam!"

He pushed her angrily away, and left her with a withering look of scorn.

It always ended so. Katherine was always put in the wrong, and, loving her husband faithfully, this was hard to bear.

A wild thought crossed her mind as she was left alone. She knew her husband's brother loved her; for once, long ago, when she was a girl, he had told her so, and she had thrown

away a true heart for the sake of this man who neglected and insulted her.

But the next moment she was on her knees, praying for help against temptation, and then she quietly wiped away her tears, and throwing herself down on a lounge, she slept uneasily until daybreak.

Once in the night she thought she heard a step. She listened, and felt almost sure the door closed carefully behind some one who went out; but, persuading herself that it was fancy, she rose to go to her room.

When she entered her chamber and struck a light she saw a small, folded paper pinned to the sleeve of her dress. Hastily unfastening it, she unfolded it and read:

"DEAR KATE,—I am tired of causing trouble in your home. After leaving you, to-night, Guy came to my room and made some unpleasant remarks to me, telling me plainly that my presence here is no longer welcome. I have packed some necessary articles, and have left all in order. I shall, of course, call to see you soon.

"Affectionately your brother,

"ARTHUR FAIRLEIGH."

The next day the papers were full of the account of a fatal accident or murder at the bachelor apartments of one Signor Moro, a young Italian, whose handsome face and large fortune had made him popular in society during the season just past.

The unfortunate victim, Howard Preston, was a gentleman well-known to Mr. and Mrs. Fairleigh as an intimate friend of their brother Arthur, and Katherine shuddered as she thought of one so promising being thus cut off in his youth.

She wondered a little, also, if Arthur had known of this when he had come in, so pale and worn, the night before. His sudden departure, too! Could he possibly be mixed up in this terrible affair?

Her heart almost stopped beating as she thought of this; and at that moment the housemaid entered, saying,—

"There's a gentleman in the parlour wishes to see you, ma'am. He didn't give no name at all."

Mrs. Fairleigh went down at once.

A courteous-looking, plainly-dressed man rose as she advanced, and, bowing, said,—

"There are other ways of dealing in such affairs, madam, but I never use deceit or disguise unless it is necessary. I am a police officer. I have come to ask some questions relating to the terrible affair which occurred at Signor Moro's rooms last night."

"Ask me!" cried Kate, turning white. "Why, I know nothing about it! But be seated, sir," she added, coldly; "and pray explain."

"If I was too abrupt," he resumed, as he complied, "I beg your pardon! Your brother-in-law, Mr. Arthur Fairleigh, was intimate with the unfortunate young fellow who was killed, and he is a close friend of the Signor's. That he was there last night is certain. I have already seen your husband, who tells me that he found his brother here with you when he returned last night, before midnight. Did you happen to notice the exact hour of Mr. Arthur Fairleigh's entrance?"

"I did, sir, for I was leaning against the mantelpiece. My clock chimes the quarters, and it had struck twice for half-past eleven, one minute before Arthur entered. My husband came in about ten minutes later."

"This tallies exactly with what he told me," said the officer, consulting a small note-book; "but are you sure your clock was exact?"

"It is regulated by a clockmaker in the neighbourhood, and keeps excellent time. I think it could be depended upon."

"One thing more. Pray pardon me if I seem impertinent or unduly inquisitive; remember, I only ask questions directly in my line of duty. Mr. Fairleigh, your brother-in-law, left this house in the night. That looks bad. Can you explain it? Your husband, I tell you frankly, exhibited an angry reserve on

that point, which leads me to suppose that some quarrel took place, or some ill feeling exists."

Kate flushed painfully, and pondered for a moment. Then meeting the kindly-sympathizing glance of the detective, she told him plainly, with as little reserve as she could, of her husband's unjust suspicion, and of her brother's note.

"I suppose he pinned it to my sleeve before leaving last night, for I slept on this lounge until morning," she continued, "and the gas was burning low. I have the note here. Will you read it?"

"With your permission I will."

And taking it from her outstretched hand, he perused it attentively, and then returned it.

"Have you any idea where Mr. Fairleigh is?" giving her a searching look.

"I have not, sir."

He rose.

"I thank you, madam, for your courteous treatment, and for your candid replies. It may possibly be necessary for you to repeat this in court. I hope not; but if so, I have no doubt you will willingly aid in the cause of justice. The Italian insists that the shooting was accidental. He says, as you may have read in the papers, that the quarrel began about some remark; that he seized a small pistol, which he supposed unloaded, and pointing it, threatened to shoot Mr. Preston if he did not retract his words. He admits that he handled the weapon carelessly; he says it slipped in his hand and went off, killing his former friend instantly. He is in deep distress and no one can help feeling sorry for him."

With these words he withdrew, leaving Kate pleasantly impressed with his gentleness and consideration.

Arthur did not turn up until after the trial. To her great relief Kate did not need to appear, and the court decided that the shooting was accidental.

The Italian returned to his own country as soon as he was set free.

Then Arthur called on his sister-in-law one afternoon, and informed her why he had remained away.

"Kate," he said, "I fear you will condemn me. I was present when poor Preston met his death. Moro's clock was wrong; he had a habit of putting it back an hour or so, to make us stay later. It was a trick of his, and so it happened that I got here at half-past eleven, and the officers, noting the time by his clock, made the mistake. They never seemed to think his timepiece might be wrong. Well, I could not have sworn the shooting was accidental, for I was not sure, nor am I yet. Moro says it was, and I am sure I hope so for his sake, poor old fellow. I liked him well; indeed, I believe I loved him. I could not have appeared against him. But it is over now. I never want to see his face again. And Kate, dear, I am off for the Continent to-morrow. I only came to say good-bye; and tell me—do you think I did wrong?"

"It is always wrong, I suppose," she answered, gently, "to avoid doing all we can to aid in bringing truth to light; but I feel with you in your shrinking to appear against your friend, and—No, I do not blame you. Good-bye now!"

"A long good-bye, dear sister!"

Then he kissed her cheek, pressed her hand, and was gone.

Three years passed. Guy Fairleigh pursued his wild course of dissipation, and after nearly breaking his sweet wife's heart he fell ill and died.

She mourned for him sincerely, for she had loved him through all and to the end. After that the lonely strain of the years grew unbearable, and she left her chilly home and went to Italy, hoping some warmth might creep into her heart with the bright, southern sunlight.

And perhaps it did, for she began to feel vaguely comforted.

One day she was driving slowly through the

picturesque town of Verona. Her black veil was thrown back, and the heavy crêpe draperies fell about her like dark shadows, throwing out the pure, sweet tints of her lovely face.

Looking indifferently at the passers, her attention was suddenly attracted by a tall gentleman, who was regarding her fixedly. His face had something in it strangely familiar. It reminded her of her dead husband.

No thought of his brother crossed her mind, until, hurrying close to the carriage, he made sign to the driver to stop; and then, with a glad cry of "Kate!" he sprang in beside her, and held her willing hands in a close welcome.

"Arthur, I did not know you. How you have changed! It is the dark beard and the close-cut hair, and your Italian bearing, I suppose; but indeed I should have passed you by."

They had much to say to one another, and then she drove him to her own home.

"Kate, my dear sister!" he said then; "now give me my kiss of welcome."

She was his sister, to be sure, but the kiss he pressed on her lips was hardly brotherly, and he did not drop the hand he had taken.

"You refused me long ago, dear, when I asked you to marry me. Will you accept me now?"

"Arthur—I ought not to say it to you, perhaps, but my first marriage was so wretched that I have resolved never to marry again. You do not know—"

"I do know more than you know yourself," he muttered, between his teeth; and his hand loosened over hers.

But as she tried to withdraw it he held it firm.

"I promise to love and cherish you, my darling, until you are so happy that the dark past will seem like a sad dream. Trust me, love!"

She wavered.

He then threw his arm around her protectively.

"Where shall it be?" he said.

And Kate, seeing that he would take no refusal, gave in at last, and answered sweetly, with a vivid blush and drooping eyes,

"Whichever you please."

THE END.

Along with the helping hand there should always go a helping sympathy.

The Record of COLD WINTERS.—An historical review of extreme winters in the past shows that the Black Sea was frozen over in the year, 408, and 761, when the snow in some places was fifty feet deep. In 822 the Danube and the Elbe were frozen so that teams crossed them; in 850 the Adriatic was frozen; in 991 everything in Europe was frozen, causing pestilence and famine. In 1067 travellers were often frozen to death; in 1138 the Po was frozen to the sea; wine casks burst and trees split with the cold; in 1226 the Danube was frozen to the bottom. In 1316 crops failed; also in 1339. The three winters of 1492-93-94 were extremely severe; there being at one time forty days of uninterrupted snow. In 1563 winds had to be cut with hatchets. In 1684 coaches were driven on the Thames; in 1709 frost penetrated to the depth of nine feet. In 1715 shops were built on the ice in the Thames. In 1744-45 ale froze when exposed to the air; 1809, 1812 and 1814 were also severe winters. Numerous as these severe winters seem in an enumeration of them, there are not many of them in their ratio to the whole number of years. The period extends over fourteen centuries; and in that time only twenty-two winters of extraordinary severity are here recorded, being on an average one in every forty-four years. But if we deduct from the number the groups of cold winters, it leaves only eighteen winters or seasons in fourteen centuries. So that two generations out of three are not likely to suffer from these terrible freaks of nature.

"EVERY DAY."

We are each one older growing,
Every day.
Down life's river swift are rowing,
Every day.
Steered for temples ever standing,
We are borne at God's commanding,
Near and nearer to the landing,
Every day.
O'er the deal ones some are weeping,
Every day.
In the church-yard mounds are heaping,
Every day.
These but give a pensive token—
Ties of love must yet be broken,
And the last farewell be spoken,
Every day.
Let our kindly aid be given,
Every day,
Unto those oh! tempest-driven,
Every day.
Words of hope for the despairing,
And their troubles gladly sharing,
Give our souls a higher bearing,
Every day.

Let us strive to be forgiving,
Every day.
Let our words be kind and loving,
Every day.
Let us goodly seeds be sowing,
That for Heaven may be growing
Fruits, to pay the debt we're owing,
Every day.

May we all grow wiser, purer,
Every day.
And our sacred trust be suret,
Every day.
If our hearts but faithful prove us,
Heaven's King will better love us,
And with angels watch above us,
Every day.

May the grace of God attend us,
Every day.
And His loving hand befriend us,
Every day.
Let our souls renewed hope borrow,
We shall, on some happy morrow,
Leave this land where cometh sorrow,
Every day.

C. B.

MILDRED'S INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNDER THE LASH.

THERE was a moment's silence—a silence broken only by the low mutter of the rising storm—a moment during which the tempter thought he had conquered.

Slowly Milly rose to her feet, fearlessly, as in the days of her proudest quondam; she lifted her head and faced him, no longer white, stricken, despairing, but with all a woman's wakened spirit in her flashing eye, and burning cheek, and curling lip.

"Your wife?" she repeated, scornfully. "Your wife, Jasper Vernon? Beggared, nameless, homeless, I may be, but I am not yet a slave to be bought and sold. I ask neither your pity nor your mercy. I ask nothing, save that you will leave me without insulting my womanhood, my helplessness, my despair!"

"Leave you?" he repeated, hoarsely. "Do you know what my leaving you means, mad girl? It means that by to-morrow's dawn you will be worse than a beggar—worse than an outcast! Your story will be whispered far and near; you, the living lie, will be the theme of every gossiping tongue; the romance of the clever adventurress will find its way into the papers; it will be discussed in dainty drawing-rooms; it will be laughed at at the

clubs; the old dotard of an uncle will have to bide his proud head from public derision, and the happy bridegroom—ha, ha!—the happy bridegroom; it is hard to say which he will find most agreeable—his notoriety or his remarkable escape."

She was quivering all over—quivering like some creature beneath the lash; but the dark eyes met his own boldly, scornfully.

"Have you done, Jasper Vernon?" she asked.

"Where will you turn for shelter—nay for bread?" he continued, relentlessly. "Once you might have claimed respect, or at least pity; now—now you have lost all right even to these. Who would dare seek across a virtuous threshold the whoremonger, serpent-like, into an honoured home only to deceive and betray?"

"Have you done?" she repeated again, in the same dry accents.

"Have I done?" he echoed, his own voice suddenly breaking—"have I done? Milly, look up. The storm gathering in these darkening heavens is but a faint type of that which will sweep down upon your unprotected head. Poverty, scorn, derision, contempt—all these will be your portion; and I can have you from all, child—I alone—I alone! Gerald Fairfax's love would wither like a summer flower at the touch of the frost. It was a love born of hope and sunshine; mine burst into life on the idyl-banks of pain and despair. He wedded Mildred Vane. Do you think he would stoop to wed Emily Ford?"

"Have you done?" she asked again, through her white, trembling lips.

And then, swiftly turning from him, she passed back into the cabin, where the ragged boy still watched by the rigid, motionless form he had been told not to leave alone.

"Jasper Vernon"—and she laid her hand upon her father's corpse—"here at least I can command the respect due to the lowest, the poorest, the most degraded! I ask nothing from you—neither justice, nor pity, nor charity—nothing! I stand here before you Mill Ford, the outcast, the beggar, and command you to leave me with my dead!"

And he left her; but it was not to return to Vernon Hall.

Through what strange, fierce agonies of despair he passed that night, to what dark depths or dazzling heights his maddened spirit wandered, only those can guess to whom love has come after long years of defiance; no bright-winged angel, but a victor, armed with the flaming sword that guards the closed gates of an Eden they may never hope to enter.

All through that night of tempest he must have wandered alone in the storm; for at the first dawn of the morning old Phil was aroused by Jasper Vernon, with drenched garments and death-white face, standing over him.

"Make ready the boat!" he said. "I want it at once!"

And through the pearly gates of the morning, over the river that was just sobbing itself to death, Jasper Vernon rowed away, never to return to his native place.

It was a night long remembered at Vernon Hall, not alone for the fierce tempest that made the strong walls tremble, and the stone rafters quiver, and sweep garden, and terrace, and orchard bare—not alone for the awful shock that went through the house when the West Tower was struck by lightning, and Jasper's laboratory, with all its mystic appurtenances, left a smouldering ruin—not alone for these terrors of elemental strife that made the servants gather, pale and trembling, in Mrs. Truscott's little room below stairs, and whisper it was surely the night of doom.

A night of doom it seemed, indeed; for, while the tempest was at its height, the dread rumour went forth that Jasper and his cousin were missing, and a thrill of wonder and dismay went through the household when the rumour was found to be true.

They had not been seen since nightfall, when

old Nat, the gardener, declared they had walked off "friendly as lambs" from the rose-garden, where, at Miss Mill's bidding, he had gathered all the blossoms for the glad festival of the morrow.

"I told her a storm was coming up then," said the old man, shaking his head. "I told her it was a-coming up then; but young folks is heedless, and maybe they was caught out in it somewhere, and had to find shelter."

"Shelter!" repeated the grey-headed butler, with solemn insignificance. "It 'ull be a long shelter, and a cold shelter, they'll find to-night if they are lost in storm like this. Listen to the wind! If they were out in the boat, my friends, they'll never see the light of another day."

"Eh, Lord ha' mercy on us! Don't say the like of that, Mr. Soane," sobbed poor Bessie, her spirit quite subdued by the terror around her. "She that is to be a bonnie bride on the morrow, and the noble gentleman, Gerald Fairfax, a-coming to claim her with the morning light!"

"It wouldn't be the first time that a wedding had been turned into a funeral," said Soane, lugubriously. "And I've seen nights I haven't spoke of from first to last, from first to last! It isn't for nothing that the mate has been seen abroad at night with his dark lantern."

"Has he been seen, Mr. Soane?" was the breathless inquiry.

"More than once, and by eyes that I can't doubt," answered Mr. Soane, mysteriously. "It was only two nights ago that I saw him myself a-starting out from the West Tower just at the stroke of midnight. And when he walks—my friends, when he walks, it bodes no good to them, his wicked spirit hates to see in his place. 'Eh, Lord have mercy on us! what's that?'

And Mr. Soane sank back in his chair, his usually rubid visage ashen with terror, as a piercing shriek rang through the house.

"It's Miss Barbara," Bessie found voice to whisper. "Something awful has happened. Mr. Soane, in the name of Heaven, gasee!"

They hurried up-stairs, trembling and terrified. The library door stood open, and there was revealed a scene more awful than the wildest fury of the tempest without.

Sir Charles Vernon stood in the centre of the room, his face livid, his eyes blazing, his mighty form trembling with all an old man's terrible wrath—the wrath that, slow to kindle in the chilling blood, when it does break forth bursts in such fierce strength as often to snap the weakened cord of life in twain.

And in his grasp, her slender arm clenched by the old baronet's hand, every muscle of which stood out as if wrought in steel, covered his niece Barbara Vernon, white as her own dress, but with eyes that flashed like the storm-rent clouds without.

"Help! help!" she cried again. "Soane—Thomas—seize your master! He is mad—he would kill me!"

"She lies!" thundered the old man. "She lies! There is no truth, no mercy, no charity in her. She is a cold, bloodless thing, without heart and soul. I know it now—I have always known it. She would let loose her venom in any home, on any hearth!"

"My venom!" she repeated, scornfully—"my venom! It is but the truth I tell you to-night, and my brother can bear witness to it; the convict, wretched, dying in yonder swamp, can bear witness to it; a score of others, whose words have neither venom nor sting, can bear witness! She herself dare not deny her living lie! My poor, old, ailing uncle, you have harboured under your roof, and threatened upon your hearth, and taken to your heart, one who—"

"Hush!" cried the baronet, in an awful tone—"hush, girl! One word more, and I cast you from me for ever! One word more, and I will never look upon your face again! Let her be what she may"—the hoarse voice shook—"I—I—oh, Heaven, my Millie! my Millie!"

And then a dread change came over the passion-flushed face, and Truscott and Soane

sprang forward in time to catch the senseless form of their master, as he fell heavily forward into their arms.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THROUGH THE NIGHT TO THE DAWN.

The calm was indeed at an end—the turbulent, treacherous calm. The storm had burst in all its fury on sea and shore.

The wind shrieked like a maddened demon as it tore its way through the forest and down the hill-side, snapping giant trees like reeds in its path, sweeping away whole harvests of golden grain and ripening fruit, stripping the summer of her bridal garlands, the coming autumn of her crown.

The fierce roar of the thunder was joined by the hoarse voice of the wind as it swept on in its mad course; the rain fell in blinding torrents, and the cold, blue gleam of the lightning revealed a world that seemed given over to powers of darkness and death.

But there was one watcher through that night of terror whose spirit seemed scarcely conscious of the demons of the storm that raged around her—one whose ear seemed drilled to the fierce discord of elemental war.

Like one crushed out of life and consciousness, Millie kept her look, despairing vigil, by her father's body.

The walls of her writhed shelter rocked and trembled in the wind; the rain poured through the cracks and crevices of the neglected roof; the very earth beneath her seemed quaking with the throes of nature's anguish.

But not a feature in her white, set face, changed. She was like one dead—the dead who sleep alike through sun and storm.

No help came to her—none save the boy who was shivering and crying with fear at her feet. She went through the awful horror of that night alone.

Mechanically, she straightened her father's stiffening form, composed the features as well as she could; then flinging a sheet over the body, she sat down beside it, white and tearless as a statue of stone.

Save for the burning light in her great, dark eyes, she might have seemed lifeless, as the cold clay over which she kept her watch.

All was over—the sweet dream, the bitter awakening, the struggle, the sorrow, the sin. All was over—that maddening delusive glimpse of love, of hope, and happiness.

She was back again in the depths from which she had been lifted; nay—had he not spoken the truth, her tormentor? in depths deeper and darker still.

She was Mill Ford, the outcast, the beggar, the convict's daughter. Nay, worse—she was Mill Ford, the adventuress, the traitress.

Who would cast a pitying glance—stretch a helping hand to her now? Not the old man, into whose home and heart she had stolen, under the tender care name of his loved and lost; not the pale, cold girl, who had always envied and hated her; not the lover, whose suit she had so indignantly scorned; not one of those who, but a few nights ago, had bent in eager homage around the fair young mistress of Vernon Hall—the heiress of its master's uncounted thousands, the bright beautiful Mildred Vane.

They would scorn, and despise, and shrink from Mill Ford.

Who would believe that she had not been so cruelly to blame?

Who would understand the strange mist that had blinded her eyes—the unknown border-land betwixt life and death, in which she had "lost her way?"

Who but one—but one? and he who had guided her back with such mistaken tenderness—he who had turned her faltering steps into the strange new morning-land in which she had gone so hopelessly astray—he, who had given her back a life all bright with sweet delusions—ah! he would scorn and despise her most of all.

"Gerald! Gerald!" And though no sound

escaped the white, compressed lips, it was the one wail that went up from the breaking heart. "Oh, that I had died ere I wakened from the dream of your love—oh, that I had died—that I had died!"

And then, step by step, with clear unerring vision, that was torturing in its accuracy, she went over the strange path by which she had been led to this—to this.

Ah, there were no mists to blind, no shadows to bewilder, her now!

She had been the toy, the sport, the plaything of mocking fate from the first, tossed up and hurled down at its cruel pleasure.

There had been no eye to pity, no voice to guide, no hand to help her now!

The dim lamp by the side of the couch was flaring and smoking in the wind, and she put forth her hand to shade it.

As she did so she noticed some vials on the table; one was a small, rather peculiarly shaped one with a label, on which two words seemed to stand out in startling distinctness—*Landanum Poison*!

She stood looking at it as if fascinated, the burning light in her eyes growing brighter and brighter. The boy, her one companion, had sobbed himself to sleep; her father's eyes were sealed for ever.

What if she should sleep, too!—she, the beggar, the outcast, the spurned, deserted one, who had neither friends nor home—she, for whom neither earth nor heaven had pity or mercy—she whose heart and hope were already dead—what if she might sleep, too, the dreamless sleep that would know no wakening—sleep through a long, dark night that would know no morning of shame and scorn?

A fierce clap of thunder shook the house. She did not hear it. She stood still, with that burning gaze growing brighter and brighter, as if with the light of some destroying fire within her soul.

"Why not?" whispered the tempting voice of the despairing demon. "What can life give to you but scorn and wretchedness? He may pity you, if he finds you—dead! For the dead, men may not scorn!"

She took the vial in her hand. It held so little—so very little—and yet there was enough.

She lifted it to her lips, and then—then was there a rustle of angel wings through that curse-darkened room; or was it only the echo of a loving voice, sweeter than an angel in its dying trust?

"You will live bravely, nobly, purely, Mill, for my sake!"

"Mill, Mill, Mill!"

And with a low, heart-breaking cry, the vial fell shivered into atoms on the floor, and the half-maddened girl dropped, shuddering, on her father's corpse.

"Oh, Heaven help me! pity me! save me! Mill! Mill! my lost angel, my sister. I will try to live for your sake!"

And the night wore on—the long night of storm, and darkness, and utter despair—despair whose first bitterness seemed to give place to a strange apathy, like the insensibility that comes from a mortal blow.

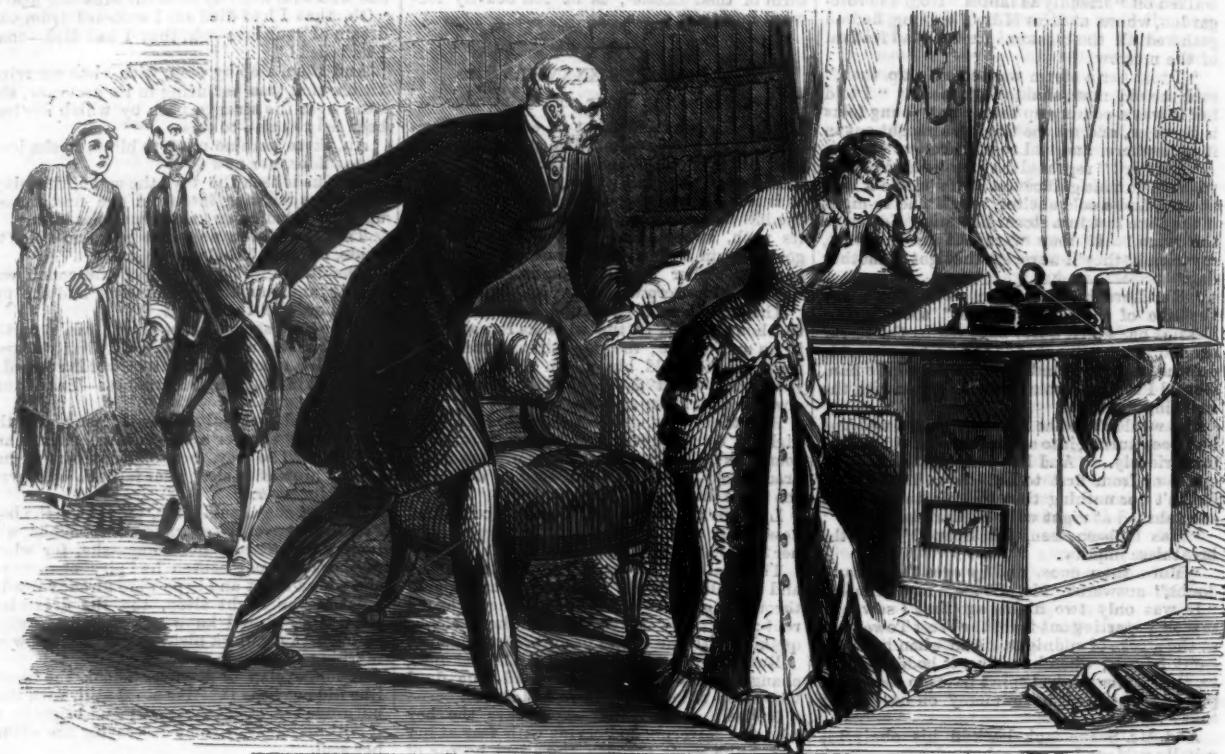
The storm burst forth again with redoubled fury; the wind shrieked like a demon-driven spirit, over valley and hill; the rain swept down in passionate bursts, as if heaven itself wept over earth's torture; and still Mill, motionless, seemingly unconscious, knelt by her father's body, the father who, in life and death had been a curse instead of a blessing to her.

And then slowly the storm lulled; the fierce clamour of strife seemed to die away in low mutterings; a faint, pearly light broke through the darkness; the breaking mists on the eastern hill-tops flushed with rose, brightened into gold.

And still the white-faced girl knelt by the ghastly figure, on whose features death was imprinting each hour a darker touch.

The boy aroused up, and spoke to her twice, thrice, then, terrified by her white face, her strange silence, sped away.

A sunbeam struggled through the dim



[CAUGHT IN HER OWN TRAP.]

smoky window—another and another; the room was flooded with rosy, golden brightness.

The night had passed. It was morning, and still she did not move. What were daylight or darkness to her now?

There was a footstep at the door. She heard it with the same dull apathy. They must come, of course, those who would give the help she needed for this poor clay—give it with scorn and contempt.

She had not a farthing—not a farthing to place her father in his pauper's grave; yet she must stay here and see him laid to rest, and then and then—

"Milly!" Was she dreaming? was some maddening delusion gaining hold upon her again? "Milly!" She tried to stir, to start to her feet, but she could not; all power of motion was gone. "Milly, my darling—my own, look up to me!"

It was his arms that were about her, his voice that was in her ear, his eyes, dim with strange tears of tenderness, that were gazing into her own. Ah! she was going mad—surely she was going mad!

"My poor lost, tortured darling—my storm-tossed dove! Oh, Heaven, what you must have suffered this night, Milly!"

She found strength to start up at last—to start up like some creature tortured, bewildered, maddened by mortal pain.

"Leave me!" she cried, hoarsely—"leave me! You do not know who, what I am. Leave me! I—I can bear no more!"

"Leave you!" he echoed. "Never, darling! You are maddened by grief, by terror. You do not know what you say. This is no place for you. Darling, I have come to take you home."

"Home!" she echoed, bitterly—"home—my home is *here!* Do you not know yet?"

"I know all!" murmured the low voice beside her. Ah! never so clear, so steady, so deep with tenderness as now! "Milly I knew all last night before I came here—all, before I came to Vernon Hall, to find my bride!"

"That I—I am *his* child!" she faltered, pointing to the dead body before her—"the outcast, the beggar, the convict!"

"That you were his child," repeated the calm strong voice—"a child, and yet the daughter of a proud and noble race, the mistress of uncounted wealth, the heiress of the haughty Camerons; and my lawyers have been searching the round earth for you, darling, and it was only yesterday the clue was found! It was old Micky Doolan who gave it to us—your old friend Micky. And I, your doctor, your lover—I who led you back bewildered from the shores of the unknown land, I who guided your trembling feet into the paths when they went so helplessly astray—I understood all!"

"Not all," she whispered, the light of life, of love, of hope, trembling like the flush of the morning on her face. "Gerald, do not take me to your heart until you hear all. For four weeks—four bitter weeks—I have—"

"Remembered," he said, his face shadowing as he glanced around the wretched room. "And oh, my love! what torture that memory must have been. You remembered—"

"And deceived you!" she faltered. "But, Gerald, the sin was for love's sake."

"For love's sake!" he echoed, drawing her to his heart, "and for love's sake it is forgiven. Oh! my sweet, how could you doubt me? How could you think that name or fame could change a love like mine? You are as dear to me standing here in this hovel as you would be on a royal throne—nay, dearer, for here 'love is all!'"

And lifting her eyes to his with the sweet trust of old, she read in the tender gaze that met her own that to him—this true friend, this loyal lover—love was indeed all!

And so, although Sir Charles's illness postponed the marriage until Christmas, the wedding bells chimed forth merrily after all.

And the old Hall beamed forth its cheeriest welcome, while the holly-wreathed walls, and bowers of spicy evergreens, and royal fires blazing on the spacious hearths, made every

one declare that winter was decidedly the jolliest time in the year for bridal roses to bloom.

Sir Charles gave away the adopted daughter whom his stout old heart had never given up, and pretty Daisy was bridemaid; for Barbara had gone to her brother, who had a professorship in some far-famed college across the seas, where the strange, pale beauty of the beautiful English girl was considered as wonderful as the talents that made her brother's name a power in the land.

Colonel Seymour was at the wedding, and drank the health of Gerald's bride, with a reckless disregard of gout.

Mrs. Marston was there, gentle and sweet as a guardian spirit stooping from a nobler sphere; and the old solicitor, Humphrey Morgan, with evident approval of the whole affair as a shrewd piece of business, that settled the claims of the rival "Cameron heirs" most satisfactorily.

But no thought of claims or heritage marred the solemn sweetness of that hour to those who, through storm and sunshine, light and darkness, life and death, had proved love was all.

And the world, that got only broken echoes of our story, mixed matters for once in a very friendly way, and whispered what a romantic thing it was for the heiress of the Camerons to come down to Vernon Hall under another name, and win the lover who would have been otherwise too proudly disinterested to think of suing for so richly dowered a bride.

And those who knew let the wise world say what it pleased, for there was no need to tell the story of the path that was lost and found so strangely and sadly, of the love that suffered, and sinned, and struggled, or the mystery which had surrounded Mildred's Inheritance.

[THE END.]

CHARLES KEAN said a bad horse was like a bad play—it can't run, and won't draw.



[A SWEET RECONCILIATION.]

NOVELLETTE.]

FREDDY'S FOLLY.

CHAPTER I.

"Tis too hot to live," said a drowsy voice, and a girl-woman lifted a lovely baby face from her bare, dimpled arms, and puckered her pretty brows into a discontented frown.

Winfred Woodgar was sweet and twenty—a tiny, childish creature, with innocent, wide-open, blue eyes, a wealth of flaxen hair, and a lovely flower-tinted face that set one dreaming of Tennyson's "Rose-bud Garden of Girls." Though a true-hearted honest little lady, Freddy Woodgar, as she was commonly called among her friends, was an audacious flirt, and as full of fun and daring as a schoolboy.

She often scandalized the starchy little town of Steyning by her naughty little freaks and extremely fashionable, not to say fast, costumes. Her last caprice was to coax her big sailor brother to buy her a tricycle, upon which she spun through the quaint High-street daily, looking very "chic" and charming in her saucy sailor-hat, and tailor-made New-market coat.

Freddy Woodgar lived with her sister-in-law, a young widow, in an old-fashioned, low-roofed house, a little out of the town—a house that looked like a huge bee, because of its yellow front striped with dark brown beams. Roses and jasmine bloomed about the porch, and the little garden had a trim Dutch look with its neat, clipped hedge and quaintly trained trees; a pretty, reposeful place, that looked deliciously shady in the glaring sunlight, yet Freddy could find it in her heart to grumble as she looked out at the white road and sun-scorched trees.

She was quite alone, not a sound disturbed the stillness; her daily tasks were finished, and she had nothing to do but grumble, for Agnes had gone to town on a visit, and their

little maid-servant had gone home to nurse a sick sister.

Freddy stretched her arms above her head, rubbed her eyes, with a yawn, and tried to rouse her slumbering senses to their wonted activity. After another lazy look out of her bedroom window she plunged her flushed face into a basin of clear cold water, and then raised a dripping saucy face to the yellow glass, and smiled a wicked, little smile. An idea had struck her, she would shut up the house, and go out somewhere for the rest of the day.

Her Undine-like eyes lost their dreamy languor; she swiftly brushed out the short, shining curls that clustered about her dainty head, put on a clean crisp dress of soft linen, and thus tripped off to her sister's room, which was in confusion.

"I must put away Aggie's dresses I promised," she said, as she snatched up a sombre garment and shook out the crêpe folds smartly. "I hate black," she muttered, as she brushed the dust off the skirt, "it makes one feel such a blot. Oh! I wish Aggie had taken me with her. What shall I do for a whole week alone?"

The skirt was folded and laid aside, next a handsome dolman had to be brushed and folded, then a dainty widow's bonnet claimed her attention; she found the white cap loose, so she got a needle and cotton and fixed it afresh. When she had done it she laid her thimble down on the dressing-table, and, struck by a sudden fancy, put the bonnet on her pretty head. It suited her alarmingly. She gave a little shudder at sight of herself, for she had heard it was fearfully unlucky to try on a widow's cap.

"I was certainly meant for a widow," she thought, scanning her pretty, startled face; "but how horrible it must be; so lonely, and altogether miserable!"

Then her face brightened, and she thought, "It would be great larks to go to Brighton in Aggie's clothes! A widow can go anywhere; she is always respected. And how delicious

the sea breeze would be after this heat! There's the pier, or a sail in the *Skylark*. Oh! I must risk it, 'tis a splendid idea; the fare's not much, and I've plenty of housekeeping money."

She hastily drew out a little well-filled purse, counted out the contents, and smiled serenely as she thought what a very little she could live on, and what an ample surplus there was for pleasure. Such pleasure, too! her very fingers tingled with excitement. She loved the sea and the gaiety of a seaside life; she was longing to get away from the dull routine of her life at Steyning, eager to stretch her wings and fly away to fresh scenes. To her dauntless spirit the idea of doing something out of the common was truly charming. She saw no sin in the innocent deceit, and fancied it would be but an enjoyable escapade, which would work injury to no one, and give her a real good time.

So she hastily unfolded the sombre skirt, and busily ran a tuck to shorten it to suit her petite proportions. When it was finished she tried it on. It was a handsome garment, a wee bit the worse for wear, but well-preserved and neat. Freddy thought it would do delightfully, for she would not be afraid of spoiling it. Pulling out drawers and boxes, she rummaged out some jet jewellery, and, after a slight dinner, went to her own room, and took out from her treasures a thin, well-worn, wedding-ring which had been her mother's. As she slipped it on she sighed as it caught the sunbeams.

"Poor mother! how long ago it seems since she left me. I wonder if it is wrong to put her ring to such use? I don't think so. I will wear it as a talisman against evil. 'Tis only an innocent freak, which will be great fun; but I'm afraid Aggie would think it awfully *infra dig.*, she is so severely proper; but there is nothing she will not forgive me if I ask her long enough."

Pulling off the ring she put it in her purse, and, putting on her sailor-hat, she locked up

the house, and went out into the sunlight to find out the time the train started. As she walked down the street a few folks turned to look at her. One stiff old lady snorted and shook her head at a tall youth at her side, who had been accused by his sister of going to church to worship Miss Woodgar. Freddy had given him a saucy nod, he was a companion of hers; in fact, he boasted, to his mother's disgust, that he had taught this naughty little fairy to ride her tricycle.

Freddy pushed her hat farther from her face as she neared the station, and wished she had thought to bring a sunshade. As she passed St. Andrew's Church a gentleman, who had been lingering there, turned back in hand, turned and gazed with bemusement at the wall set up little love with the drowsy Greuse head.

Freddy, unconscious of the dark eyes that took in every detail of her beauty, went on whistling a pet waltz. After making a few inquiries at the station she came out, waiting on a waiting card the time of the train.

"The first train leaves here at 8.30," she said, "and the last gets back at 9.15. I must remember that. I wish I could spin down in my tricycle, but that would be quite too bad for the proprieties."

Then she hastened home, as her tea, and strolled out again to lay in a good supply of goodies, which she bought at a quaint little shop in the High-street, a shop that had a town clock on top of it, for it had once been the town hall. Freddy bought some dainty home-made pies, a large cake of toffee, and a lump of gingerbread, all of which she packed in a pretty hand-bag, tucked with crocus, poppies, cornflowers, and wheats. Then she laid out her sister-in-law's second-best clothes, and went to bed by moonlight, to dream of the sea, and fancy herself a sea-maiden of marvellous attraction.

She was up with the lark in the morning, hurried over her few domestic duties, and quickly dispatched her simple meal. Then she dressed herself carefully in her sister's weeds, put on the slender wedding-ring, and, fixing a great bunch of dawny roses in her breast, locked up the house, and, with her veil down and her bag in hand, started off for the station, fearing to look round lest she said see some familiar face.

Safely seated in the train she breathed freely, ventured even to buy a paper, and, when the train started, raised her veil and prepared to be comfortable. It was a glorious morning, the corn-fields waved beneath the soft summer breeze like seas of gold.

At Bramber a gentleman jumped in, and stared at sight of Freddy. "How like that lovely little girl I saw yesterday," he thought; "and how sadly young to be a widow."

Then, being a gentleman, he felt ashamed of bringing the blush to Freddy's face, and buried his head in his paper. When they reached Brighton he handed Freddy out, and lifted his hat, courteously as she sped past him, and was lost in the crowd.

Walking down West-street Freddy opened her mouth as though to drink in the racy sea breeze. The sea and sky were blue and sunny; the scene was bright with happy life, a band played merrily, little youngsters romped along eager to reach the yellow sands; a yacht spread its white wings to the light breeze; Punch and Judy played out the well-known domestic comedy, and Freddy stopped, eager as any child to see the show.

The gentleman who had travelled with her waited too, and was vastly entertained by her evident interest in the performance. "What a pretty baby face it is," he thought, "and how pure and unworldly she looks; I should like to sketch her." So intent was his gaze that Freddy felt her eyes compelled to his, and, with a haughty little look of displeasure, she hastened away to the shining shore, and stood watching the sea-foam break in fairy spray at her feet.

A brown-faced bathing-woman coaxed her to a dip, and a few seconds later she was

breasting the waves with limbs white as the sea foam, and her close-cropped yellow head looking like a sea anemone. When she emerged from her bath she decided she had never enjoyed such a bath before; but then she remembered, with a painful sense of self-condemnation, she had never before known how jolly it is to steal a pleasure.

The breeze lifted the damp rings of hair from her forehead, as she hastened on the West pier to listen to the band, and watch the gay stream of people slowly circle round, as though the band were a pivot on which a whirling went round.

After looking at the folks a little while she went to the side to see the steamer start for Eastbourne, and while she was intent upon the busy scene the same steward fellow who had travelled with her from Bramber leapt over the rail, too, and wished some happy chance would give him an opportunity of trapping acquaintance with the witching widow; but such was care, and he reluctantly watched her leave the pier and walk towards home. He followed, at a good distance and saw her seat herself upon one of the stone grins where she knew she would be out of the hubbub. He did not like to lose sight of her, yet his inner man warned him it was luncheon time, and the Bedford looked inviting; so he reluctantly left his sombre-clad divinity, and hastened into the hotel, hoping to find her again by some lucky chance—a chance that did not come till evening, when he saw her struggling in a crowd at the railway station.

Freddy was looking terribly frightened till she felt two strong arms round her and a cheerful voice said,—

"How silly of you to get into this crowd; all to no purpose, too, for these folks are going by the London excursion."

A second later Freddy stood, faint and breathless under the clock, and her new friend was saying, compassionately,—

"Poor child, how ill you look! Let me persuade you to have a cup of coffee."

Freddy shook her head, but a sensation of faintness made her head swim, and both her little hands went out and clutched at the strong arm that had rescued her.

Without further protest she allowed him to lead her into the refreshment bar, and gratefully drank the cup of coffee he gave her. Directly she had swallowed it she drew her heavy veil over her face with a shaking hand, for just in front of her, studying a time-table, she saw the face and form of a man she was most anxious to avoid.

He was a good-looking man of middle age, in the dress of a clergyman, and was buying some sandwiches and ale. He caught sight of Freddy's white hand with its gleaming wedding-ring as she hastily drew down her veil, saw with a strange heart-sinking that she purposely avoided him; and as he caught the gleam of her golden hair and the deeply-shadowed outline of her face, he breathed heavily, and mentally took his supposed rival's measure.

Freddy allowed her new friend to conduct her to the train, and was not surprised when he followed her into the compartment, and sat himself opposite her said, softly,—

"My star must be in the ascendant, for I have longed all day for the lucky chance of making your acquaintance. I saw you first at the quaint old town of Steyning, and wondered how so bright a life could vegetate in so dull a place. My name is Malcolm Prior; may I ask yours?"

A guilty flush flew to Freddy's face as, looking at her ringed hand and widow's dress she said, with a slight hesitation,—

"I am Agnes Woodgar."

"Ah! and I see a widow! You are very young to have seen so much trouble. Poor child! how lonely you must be!"

"Yes, I am lonely; terribly so, sometimes."

"Life will brighten for you some day. Why, life is but at dawn with you; there is the glorious noon tide to come, and the quiet, happy eventide. You must be of good cheer

and look ahead; the sun is not far enough behind you to cast a lingering shadow."

Freddy smiled; it seemed so droll to her for anyone to imagine she was miserable. Her life had been empty, perhaps, and dull, but she had known no grief. Her half-brother, Alfred Woodgar, had been always distantly kind to her, and had kept the old home as refuge for her sunny head. She had not loved him much, she had seen too little of him; and when he married her governess, a girl half his age, with a tender, yielding disposition that made her a prey to his severely fault-finding temper, she had heartily pitied the tender young wife, and felt it was almost a judgment upon her brother when he fell a victim to the scourge of fever and died, leaving his patient young wife free and well provided for.

Since he had died Agnes and Freddy had lived happily together, never looking beyond the wholesome quiet and comfort of their lives till a new gentleman came in his friend's holiday time, and looked with covetous eyes upon the plaud beauty of the comely young widow.

He had got up a friendship with the two lonely women, and had so won upon the elder—dear, good, patient Agnes—that she felt with fear and trembling that love had found fresh wings in her heart, and renewed her youth in a tremendously enjoyable manner.

She had another lover away to his divinely-directed path of duty with just enough hope in his heart to keep his love warm; then she had accepted an invitation to visit the great city, hoping to read her heart aright when away from the glamour of her lover's presence.

He had gone back to his work full of hope and happiness, and then came Freddy's innocent escapade, and the miserable suspicion between this good man and his heart's desire; for the friend he saw his modest, retiring Agnes with a stranger at a bar at Brighton when she had led him to believe she was passing her time innocently and pleasantly in London.

A conviction of her deceit fastened itself upon him in a most unchristianlike manner. It is wonderful how prone the best of us are to believe evil of others, even our best beloved!

He thought it must be Agnes, for she and her sister-in-law were strangely alike in face and figure, and with queer minuteness he remembered the cut of her garments and recognized them, and, as he supposed, his sweetheart.

Felix Arton followed Freddy and her new friend into the train, but, not trusting his hot temper, he sensibly kept to another compartment, and saw only Freddy's entrance and exit; and feeling very mean and low-spirited, he dogged their steps to the quaint little cottage, saw this handsome stranger kiss his darling's, as he supposed, hand, saw her sombre weeds brush the rose bushes, and as the door closed upon her he felt as if he was shut out for ever from peace and happiness.

Alone in his cozy lodgings, he paced the room wretchedly, trying to see a gleam of hope; but it was not possible that a minister of Heaven could wed a woman so lost to decency as to deliberately deceive him, and go to Brighton and pass her time with a stranger, after leading him to suppose her in London. She whom he had believed so far above the weaknesses of her sex, a woman pure and true!

So Freddy's merry fit was more than one man, his night's rest, for her new friend, Malcolm Prior, could not tear himself away from the moonlit road that commanded a view of her bower-like home, but paced up and down, thinking of her sweet looks and merry words, and wondering why that parson fellow had looked so horrified as he kissed her hand at parting.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY one morning, when Freddy was feeding her pigeons, singing at the top of her blithe young voice, Malcolm Prior came leisurely along the sunny road and paused by

the rustic gate, charmed by the bright picture. Freddy, divested of the widow's weeds, looked ten years younger as she stood with the sun on her fair head and soft, lavender-tinted morning-dress.

"Good morning, Mrs. Woodgar. I need not ask if you are well; rosy health peeps out about you like sunrise at dawn!"

Freddy blushed rosy as she shook hands with him; wicked little flirt as she was, she felt just a little afraid of this masterful man with his great adoring eyes. A line of poetry ran in her head as she looked up at him.

"Love at first sight lives while there's life."

"I did not expect to see you this morning," she said, shyly.

"Did you not?" he answered, forgetting to release her hand, and taking in every detail of her beauty with keen appreciation. "I came to ask you to direct me to some of the most romantic spots about here. I cannot get away from my workaday world even here, for I have accepted a commission from a rich *parvenu* to paint a set of pictures representing the most picturesquely spots of his native county, Sussex."

"You are an artist, then?"

"Yes, I walk modestly in the footsteps of those men whose brush is to them what the pen is to the poet, the outlet of the soul."

"That sounds conceited," said Freddy, saucily.

"Does it? Well, we are a little conceited, I fancy, when we are natural, and my pet vanity is art. I can't live upon a lily or die upon a rose, but I love flowers. Give me that delicious rose that is reflecting its bloom upon your chin, and I will put it in a picture for you."

She laughed and gave him the flower, then said a little nervously, "Go away, please; here comes our parson, he may take it into his head to lecture me."

"It would look worse to run away now than to stay; besides, I want you to give me a cup of milk. Do you have a jingling there?"

He pointed to where Freddy had placed the morning milk on the window-sill. She smiled, and taking it up ran in to get a glass. The rector paused to shake hands with Mr. Prior; when Freddy came out he had passed on, and Malcolm looked as if he lived only in hope of drinking fresh milk tendered by fair hands.

"Of course you have done Bramber," said Freddy, recalling his desire to be directed where to look for natural beauties.

"Some part, I have, but I mean to do more. The view from the old castle wall is wonderful. Suppose you come with me to-day and show me something you think worth painting?"

Freddy shook her head.

"I know I have been very presumptuous to ask you, Mrs. Woodgar, but forgive that; 'tis not my fault that we have known each other such a little time. Everything must have a beginning, friendship as well as other experiences, and I feel we ought to be friends. Indeed I don't see why we should not."

Freddy pouted her pretty lips in perplexity.

"This is such a 'goody-goody' place," she said, coming out of her abstention with a start, "and people gossip awfully about what does not concern them!"

"Ahl! but your widowhood should be as a shield against which they tilt the lance in vain. I though you had a soul above the petty consideration of society by the independent way you got about at Brighton. I admired your pluck. I never could see why a woman should not enjoy life freely, untrammeled by ridiculous conventionalities. Say you will see me this afternoon, if only to spend an hour with me? I want to show you some of my sketches."

Freddy hesitated a second, visions of Agnes's horror and abeyance at her adventure rather startled her; yet she liked to do rashly independent things, and this man interested her as no other had done all her butterfly existence.

He saw the yielding of her looks, and said

in a tone of great entreaty, "Do come, I shall be so gratified to see if you do, for I find it fearfully dull mooning about by myself."

"I will see you some time this afternoon; I shall be busy all the morning. Where will you be? I can come along quick on my tricycle. I hope it won't shock you to hear I had a great fun to spin about on three wheels."

"Shock me, indeed! I think you are a very sensible little woman to catch at every chance of enjoyment. Life is too short to lose one opportunity of making pleasure. Sun and shade of life must mingle, but one were worse than mad to live in the gloom when one can stay in the sunlight. I'll wait for you just out of the town at three; will that do?"

"Splendidly; now go, I am starved, and I am sure my tea is getting cold."

Lifting his hat Mr. Prior hastened away, leaving Freddy with a strange feeling of exultation stirring her heart, like strong wine, to quicker beating.

All the morning she thought of Malcolm Prior's earnest, handsome face; the level music of his voice echoed in her heart, and the hours seemed long that lay between her and the time appointed for meeting him. She flushed with shame as she thought how surprised he would be to know she had been acting a part, and that, after all, she was but a thoughtless girl, to whom the great experiences of life were but shadows. All dignity, she felt, would be lost to her in his sight if she confessed the foolish part she had played; so she slipped on her mother's ring again, and shuddered a little with a feeling of repulsion at the sombre garments she had worn at Brighton.

"I can't put them on again," she thought. "They feel like a shroud; besides, people say it is awfully unlucky to even try on widow's weeds. I wish I had not begun this silly deception; 'tis not half such good fun as I fancied it would be, and 'tis so hard to keep up. But now I've set my hand to the plough I cannot turn back. I do feel an awful little cheat though, and I do hope Aggie won't be too terribly cross about it."

Thinking how best to keep up the disguise without wearing Aggie's clothes, Freddy hunted up a neat black hat and a black Newmarket coat; then tying on a veil she started on her pet plaything, her tricycle.

It was a blazing hot day, the road was white and dusty; outside the town the fields stretched cool and green where Malcolm Prior waited in the sun, lazily smoking a pipe. He came forward eagerly at sight of her, thinking how well she sat, and what a trim graceful figure hers was!

"How good of you to come," he said, pressing her hand.

Freddy lifted her veil and tucked it in the brim of her hat, saying, "I am fairly cooked; let us get out of this glare as quick as we can. I'll go on ahead, you can catch me up at the castle."

In a second she shot on leaving him to follow at his leisure.

He smiled grimly as he wondered why she had hurried off so, and rightly imagined that she did not want to be seen with him.

At the castle he found her placidly sitting under a tree eating a huge yellow pear, her ruddy lips dewy with the welcome juice. Malcolm longed to cool his lips on hers as he looked; and thinking he only envied her the pear she plunged her pretty, plump, bare hand into a pocket and fished him out its fellow.

"Where is your tricycle?" he asked, as he sank down beside her and released his sketching apparatus from his shoulder.

"Oh! I arranged that all right with the man here. I often come here to get the breeze from the hills. Sometimes the goody-goody air of our native village seems to stifle me; I feel as if there is not room in it to live. I long to get away from the intensely respectable people and pretend to myself that I am a gipsy or anything free and Bohemian. At such times I should like to live in a lighthouse above the breezy sea, where I could fancy

myself nearer Heaven. I hope I'm no wickedly discontented. I know I'm restless sometimes, restless to fever-heat."

"Most of us feel these wandering fits, I fancy. For my part, I always had a keen sympathy with the lads who run away to sea. Ah! and even the tiresome little chaps who run away from school and give their friends no end of trouble."

"Did you give your people much trouble when you were a boy?"

"I'm afraid I did. My dear old master will never confess it, yet I fancy I was as wicked a scamp as ever lived. But bad boys always grow up to be good men, you know."

"Do they? Then I am afraid you are the exception that proves the rule."

Her eyes belied her words though, for they clearly said that she believed him capable of all that is good in manhood. When they had rested and chatted over their mutual likes and dislikes, they climbed to the keep, and settled down to look over a sketch-book Malcolm had brought. It was full of clever sketches—some the designs for great pictures that he hoped some day would make him famous.

Freddy did not say much, but she felt almost an awe for the man whose fingers had fashioned the striking scenes before her. Her voice was very low and sweet as she said—

"I do not know enough about art to be a judge of painting, but these pictures look very, very beautiful and lifelike to me. I seem to feel in some of them a subtle suggestiveness of the soul that saw them with clearer eyes than are given to the ordinary run of mortals."

This was sweet flattery, indeed, from such innocent baby-like lips. Malcolm felt intoxicated by her beauty, the witchery of her words, the surrounding beauty of the place; but he was too sensible a man to startle her by any outward show of the feeling within him. Instead he talked of art, books, music, and was glad to find Freddy knew more of such matters than most of the aesthetic, intensely old-fashioned, fashionable maidens who throng the Grosvenor or revel in sales at Christie's.

The hours fled on sunlit wings; these young people seemed as well acquainted as if their friendship dated back to the bygones. An indescribable feeling of sympathy led them to open their hearts to each other, and show their hidden thoughts. Malcolm Prior said in his most dictatorial tone when discussing character, "I could forgive anything in one I loved but a direct falsehood or acted lie; that I abhor as the worst cowardice, the cruellest unreliability."

Freddy's usually dauntless heart sank suddenly. She longed to say: "I am not what I seem; mine has been a foolish deception," but the idea that this was but a fleeting friendship, the pleasure of an hour, held her back, and she went on with her rôle of widowhood, feeling all the fun of the masquerade had fallen flat and left a fearful pitfall at her feet; for if she confessed she believed it would kill Malcolm's faith in her for ever.

So she shook off the chill of her uneasy conscience, and rattled on merrily about all sorts of places and people she had known. And Malcolm, looking at her, wondered how she could pass the first year of her widowhood so merrily—wondered if the affection that had flooded her on to marriage was so shallow as to be forgotten in a year!

When the afternoon grew cooler, Malcolm persuaded her to go to the Castle Hotel and have some tea. They took it in a pretty, bower-like place, and were very merry. The people at the hotel, seeing the ring on Freddy's finger, imagined they were man and wife; and when they went together through the quaint village street, where roses and lilies grow by the pathway, a blear-eyed old woman asked Malcolm to buy "his good lady" a nosegay.

He looked quickly into Freddy's shy face, and said—

"I wish you were my own. I wish the old woman was right. Well, we'll have some

flowers out of gratitude for the suggestion, which I hope you will bear in mind and try to believe possible to realize."

"What nonsense you talk, Mr. Prior. I am surprised that you can be so silly as to suppose I think every man I meet must make love to me—in such a bare, unvarnished fashion, too! Really, it is silly of you, very!"

"I am afraid it would be very easy to make me silly about you. Come, let us go and have a look at the 'everlasting hills,' with the sun setting behind them."

They retraced their steps back to the castle ruins, and sat on one of the fragments of wall that overhung the moat.

"It looks dangerous from here," said Freddy; "yet I have often climbed up here. It's rare fun if you have not got your last new dress on."

"Shall we venture down there now?"

No, thanks, I'm too tired to scramble. I'll give you a hand to start you, if you like."

Freddy held out a plump little hand, and Malcolm took it tenderly in his. The setting sun flashed on the plain circlet of gold that he was rapidly growing jealous of, because it was a symbol of a love that had been unshamed by him.

"Surely you were never fatter than you are now, you delicious little bundle of dimples!" he said, turning the ring on her finger. "Yet look how loose it is! Would it hurt you to tell me of your husband, child? Was he good to you?"

Of course. Every one is good to me. Let us talk of something else."

"I was a thoughtless brute to recall your sorrows, Mrs. Woodgar. Pray forgive me; my interest in you led me to forget that it might be cruel to recall your grief. But the ring is large, I wonder it does not drop off."

"Oh! it does not; it is quite safe, I assure you. See!"

She shook her hand with down drooped fingers. In a second the ring slipped, like the false fetter it was, and fell amongst the undergrowth.

"Oh! my ring; do find it. I would not lose it for the world," she said, clasping her hands together.

In next to no time Malcolm was lost to sight among the trees and bushes, searching for the tiny golden circlet, vexed that his curiosity had led her to lose it.

"I cannot find it anywhere about here," he said, looking up from among the foliage below.

"Oh! pray be careful, you might fall down and hurt yourself somewhere. Come up, it frightens me to see you there."

Malcolm looked up into the lovely, anxious face, and its halo of golden curls; his heart went out to her as if she were the one woman in the world fate had found for him. The loss of the ring seemed a good omen to him, it seemed to free her from the fetters of a dead love.

Hastily climbing to her side, he said, impetuously,—

"I will find the ring sooner or later, but you shall never wear it again; I will not let you."

Freddy flushed up hotly.

"You will not let me? Why not, indeed? I think you are very presuming!"

"Perhaps I am; yet you shall forgive my presumption. I mean to make you love me so well that you could forgive me anything. Don't frown; though I might say with an old poet,—

'Her very frowns are better far
Than smiles of other maidens are.'

But, really, I am sorry I have lost your ring. Let me go down again; 'tis quite safe, I assure you, though it does look so dangerous from here; there are plenty of branches to cling to, and, in places, there are paths. Sit down and wait there till I come back to you."

He put his hands on Freddy's shoulders and pressed her down on the wall, where the stones had fallen out and made an easy seat. The sun was setting in purple and gold, everything was calm and bright as a pastoral picture.

Down below, hidden by the thick undergrowth, Malcolm whistled a gay waltz while he looked for the lost ring.

Merrily as he whistled "My Queen," his heart sank strangely with an undefined feeling of oppression.

"Surely it must be the heavy air down here, or the vapour rising from the dank undergrowth, that makes me feel so strange. I can't understand it; I feel quite ill!" he thought, as he sat down on a fallen tree and tried to get rid of a dizziness in his head. As he sat there in the silence, with heavy limbs and shivering strangely, the conviction came to him that he was going to be ill. It seemed quite the natural order of things to him when Freddy appeared by his side. He smiled a wan smile, as he said,—

"I am ashamed to confess to a womanly weakness; I feel faint."

"Oh! I am sorry. What can I do for you? Can't you get out of this stifling place and breathe the fresh air up above there?"

"Yes, in a second; 'tis passing off. I never felt so strangely before. I am afraid you will think me a great bore. I am so sorry. How did you get down?"

"By one of the paths. I tumbled part of the way. See how I have grazed my hand."

"Poor little hand!" he said, imprisoning it in his, and pressing an audacious kiss upon it.

Freddy tried to seem offended, but could not, because of his haggard looks. After awhile he felt better, he said; and they climbed together to the wall again and sat down, the cool breeze blowing upon their faces.

"You look awfully ill," said Freddy, passionately. "If I were you I should stay here to-night."

"Oh! no; I must go back. I expect some important letters. Besides, the landlady would send round the order. I think we had better go at once."

"Then you shall ride my tricycle; the walk will be nothing to me. Get on and spin away as fast as possible, and leave it in my garden."

It took a deal of persuasion to make him do this, for he could not bear the idea of Freddy walking back alone; but he felt so ill, and eager to get home to bed, that at last he allowed himself to be overruled, and got on as she desired, and found it all he could do, for the swimming in his head, to keep his seat.

Freddy followed leisurely, wondering what illness could so suddenly seize upon a strong man and master him. Malcolm soon arrived at Freddy's house, and, entering the garden, he sat down hastily in the porch, his head swam and he felt so ill that he could hardly move.

After resting awhile he rose, and put the tricycle round at the side of the house as he had seen Freddy do. While he was doing this a gentleman stepped into the garden and said,—

"Pardon me; may I ask by whose invitation you are here?"

"Certainly; by Mrs. Woodgar's."

"I saw you at Brighton yesterday with that lady."

"Very likely you did. I cannot see why you should trouble yourself about my actions; you are a stranger to me. Kindly explain your motive."

"My motive is to prevent a defenceless woman from compromising herself with a stranger, and one to whom her fair fame cannot be very dear as he leads her to do underhand actions."

"By Jove! sir; you are making assertions with a vengeance. I do not recognize your right to make so open and unguarded a charge; the lady's fair fame is very dear to me—so dear that if you attack it in this unwarrantable manner I shall be tempted to forget your cloth, and meet you as man to man, and try to give you a good thrashing."

In the heat of his anger Malcolm forgot his illness; his cheeks flushed and his eyes sparkled. The two men measured each other fiercely. Both were well-proportioned, hand-

some young fellows. Both had the fearless, open look of honest, brave manhood.

"I do not wish to quarrel with you, sir; I am by profession a man of peace. I only wish to understand clearly that you are on terms of friendship at this house, and I will leave you."

"I certainly hope to win, and be worthy of Mrs. Woodgar's friendship; and even, should fate so far favour me, dare to desire a deeper interest in the lady's life than friendship."

"Ah! I understand, sir. Forgive me if I seemed rude. I repent it, and wish you success. Good evening."

With white, set face, Felix Airtor left the house which had been the casket that contained his heart's best treasure; he saw no glory in the sunset, he felt no blessing in the balm-like breath of heaven that blew upon him softly, cooling his hot forehead. He walked on hastily till he came to a handsome house standing back from Church-street, which he entered, and said to a servant,—

"Tell your master I want to see him."

He then walked into a handsome library, seated himself in a chair, turned his back to the light and waited. His eyes looked troubled, but all other sign of feeling was kept down by his iron will.

A cheery, noble-looking old man entered and held out his hand cordially.

"Why, Felix, what has brought you from Brighton to-day?"

"Trouble, uncle."

"I am grieved to hear it, lad. Tell me about it."

"I find Agnes Woodgar has deceived me cruelly. You know we were lovers long ago, when we were too poor to marry; you know, too, how she was tempted to marry for a home when she knew I had gone to a distant mission where she could not follow me. You know how we met again here when she was free and renewed our old friendship. There has been no verbal agreement; but we each knew that when the year of mourning was up, that I should try to renew the old betrothal. Well, when I was at Brighton she agreed to write to me daily; I had many beautiful letters, and felt so sure of winning my darling. Then a letter came saying she had gone to London, and I was not to write until her return. When she was supposed to be in town I saw her at Brighton with a strange gentleman, who took her hand and kissed it at parting. To-day I met him at her house, and he boldly declared he hoped to win Mrs. Woodgar as his wife. Now you see the wedding you and I have planned so happily cannot be. I know how fond you are of Agnes; try to think the best of her, and for my sake watch over her and guard her, for she is but a girl to whom, thank Heaven, the wickedness of the world is as yet unknown. Now I shall go back to my duties with a heavy load to carry—a trouble that will weigh upon my heart while life lasts, for I have lost the only love of my lonely life."

"My dear boy, don't be rash; there must be some misunderstanding. Agnes is incapable of deceit; she is open and honest as the light of day. Do not despair; I will see her. Stay here, and try to see the bright side of the picture. Write to her and beg for an explanation. 'Tis true the facts look black against her, but she may be able to explain your doubts away. Now had it been that naughty, thoughtless little witch of a Fred, I should not have been surprised, she is capable of any insanity by way of diversion; but Agnes is different, she has suffered and been strong; is tried and true, a woman above suspicion. I will see into the matter, my old favourite could not be such a light o' love. Come and dine with me, dinner is served; and 'tis so much more enjoyable when we take it together."

Freddy, unconscious of the trouble her freak was bringing upon her dearest friends, hastened home and found Malcolm seated in the porch shivering, and looking so ill that all the woman stirred in her, and, forgetting all but that he was ill and alone, she led him into the pretty sitting-

room and made him lie down while she bustled about to get him a cup of hot tea.

Before she left him she threw a warm shawl over his feet, and he thanked her with a smile.

When he woke up the gas was lighted, and Freddy was kneeling beside him, in a cozy, home dress, holding a cup of tea for him to drink. He lifted his heavy eyes to her fair, troubled face, and it dawned upon him that he was being a trouble to her. Hastily sitting up, he said,—

"My dear girl! how good of you. I must be off. I did not mean to fall asleep; I can't think what makes me so drowsy. I've felt queer for days."

"Never mind anything, only drink this, and keep quiet; the rest will make you feel better."

"You are a good Samaritan, indeed, and I'll do anything you tell me."

He drank the tea eagerly, for he was now burning with fever; then he lay back among the cushions and mentally marvelled how he was to drag his heavy limbs to his lodgings.

"Have you far to go?" asked Freddy, who had been thinking the same thing with huge compassion, for she was a tender-hearted girl, and could see he was suffering severely. "If Aggie were here you should not go at all," she said, softly, as she put her cool hand upon his hot forehead.

"Who is Aggie?"

"My sister-in-law; such a dear, good girl. I know she would not send you away like this."

"Ah, pet, but you must, and at once too. I am more than grieved to have troubled you so much."

He staggered to his feet, and with an almost pitiful effort to look all right, pulled himself together and held out his hand to say good-bye.

"You must not go alone, you are not fit. Sit down a second while I get my hat. I'll go with you as far as your lodging, and see you safe."

Malcolm sat down to wait, and looked round the room—the pretty, homely room—with keen appreciation of its tasteful arrangement.

"How about my traps?" he asked, when she returned.

"Oh, they must remain here till you can fetch them. I'll take care of them; you are too tired to carry more than yourself."

She turned down the gas, and led the way out of the room. Malcolm followed, staggering blindly. When they were out in the cool night air she made him take her arm, and tenderly led him along. Such a wee woman she was to support a big man, and he looked down at her pretty pitiful face and found in her tender consideration a new charm.

When they reached the trim, tidy house where he was lodging, he could hardly stand. His landlady started at sight of him, saying,—

"Oh! sir, you have met with an accident."

"No, Mrs. Gates, 'tis not that; but I am ill."

Anxious for him, Freddy followed him into the house; the parlour was well lighted, and at sight of Malcolm's ghastly face the two women started.

"Lie down, sir. I'd better go for the doctor at once if the young lady will wait with you."

Freddy flushed hotly beneath the woman's inquiring eyes, but consented to stay; indeed she desired to do so, for she wanted to hear the doctor's verdict. Malcolm lay down on the little couch and dozed off again, while Freddy bathed his burning forehead and moistened his dry lips.

After a while he moved restlessly, and began to talk. Freddy trembled, for she knew his mind wandered; he confounded her with his mother, and seemed to think he was at home.

When the doctor came, Freddy slipped out of the room and waited in the dark passage till he had gone; then she hastened back to find Mrs. Gates looking awfully troubled.

"What is it?" she whispered, looking pitifully at the restless, feverish head, that moved incessantly from side to side.

"Typhus fever, miss; ain't it awful? And my hands that full with work I don't know where to turn; and my little ones, too! I forgot to ask if it was catching."

"It's always best to be on the safe side and believe it is," said Freddy, "so I'll run and get you some Condy's fluid; keep your apron wet with that and sprinkle your dress, and you'll be safe. How dreadful for him; and he cannot tell us where to send for his friends."

"There is a letter up there behind the glass. I know it comes from his mother; he told me so, and showed me what a beautiful hand she writes for an old woman."

Without hesitation Freddy sat down and read the name and address; the letter and all its anxious motherly love was sacred to her. She then asked for pen and ink, and wrote a tender, thoughtful letter, and broke the news gently to Mrs. Prior.

Then she waited till she knew her new friend was comfortably settled in bed, and ran out to post her letter and bring in such sickroom dainties as she imagined he would want.

When she returned she offered to help by staying with him till his mother should arrive.

CHAPTER III.

A wet morning in town is a very depressing affair; unlike the country, the rain, instead of freshening, seems to deaden our surroundings. So thought Agnes Woodgar as she flattened her pretty nose against a window in Broad-street, City; she was staying with a friend whose husband managed a bank. Jolly folks they were, who tried to make her visit pleasant to her, and succeeded.

This rain was bad business, for they were to have driven their guest through the West-end that day.

Agnes was thinking of her own little home, and recalling wet mornings there when the rain-drops seemed to distil sweetness everywhere, and renew the beauty of the earth as by a celestial bath.

All at once she clapped her hands, and calling to a curly-headed youngster, said. "Look! look! Archie, there is a rainbow, and it looks so queer dipping over the grim housetop."

A lady came to her side, and putting her arms affectionately about her, said, "What have we poor citizens done that we should be denied the arch of heaven, *ma belle!* You spoke as if the country folks had entered into a contract to buy up the rainbows for their exclusive and picturesque use. Heaven does not forget the dwellers in great cities, but sends light to all alike. The moonlight, now, makes this grim old city look like a place full of fairy palaces at times. There is nothing I enjoy more than moonlight walk through the City, 'tis all so grandly still and calm after the rush and crush of the day. If one would feel completely out of the hurly-burly he should spend an evening walking round the old City churches and sup serenely upon solitude. For my part I love London, and would rather rent a cellar in Drury-lane than a palace in the country; and yet I have spent most of my life at a farm-house."

"Yes, feeding fowls and milking cows, till, out of sheer compassion, I took you from mere vegetation to live with me in London," said Mr. Dusart, as he joined the group at the wide window, and sat down on the old-fashioned, cosily-cushioned window-seat.

"Freddy loves London," said Agnes, smiling; "tis the height of her ambition to live here always."

"Freddy must come and stay with us when you go home, Aggie. Steyning is a dull place for so young and merry a girl."

"Freddy always manages to make plenty of fun for herself. I think sometimes if it were not for her pretty baby face she would be more like a boy than a girl. I hope she is not getting up to any mischief; one never feels sure of her, she is such a reckless monkey."

"Letters ma'am," said a smart maid-servant entering briskly and putting a pile of letters into Mrs. Dusart's lap. She turned them over and passed two to Agnes.

"Read them, dear; they may divert your mind from the dull weather."

Agnes opened the first that came to hand, they were both directed in Freddy's free and easy scrawl. The first contained details of ordinary housekeeping matters, and a few racy remarks about life at Steyning, winding up with a request to know how soon her sister might be expected home. A postscript, heavily underlined, told that she had much to tell her sister, as she had had no end of adventures.

Agnes laid it aside with a smile hovering over her sweet face, then hastily opened the other; it was so strange, she thought, to have two letters from Freddy at once; for Freddy was a notoriously bad correspondent. The second letter proved to be one from Felix Airtton, which Freddy had enclosed. Agnes opened it with bright expectant face and read with incredulous eyes its strange contents.

He sternly accused her of unheard-of deceptions; said that, for reasons of her own, she had led him to believe she was in town visiting mutual friends, whereas she was, in reality, at home, going about with a strange man who openly confessed himself her lover. He spoke briefly of his own suffering, and said he intended to leave England within a month, to try to forget in hard work in his Master's service the cruel disappointment and grief she had caused him.

When Agnes had read it she threw it into her friend's lap and staggered out of the room, to hide her pain and perplexity in her own room.

Mrs. Dusart read the strange effusion through twice, and said, as she leant over her husband, "If you are not too busy, dear, read this and tell me what it means. I can't understand it at all."

Mr. Dusart did as desired; then said, "I should not think you could make it out, old woman. The man's mad. Evidently there is some serious misunderstanding; Airtton is not the man to bring an unfounded charge against a good woman like Agnes. I will write to him at once and assure him she is here. 'Tis a pity anything should come between them again; they are fearfully unlucky lovers. He deserves to lose her, though, for his unjust suspicion. I hate want of faith."

"Yet you were the most jealous, suspicious, and exacting of lovers."

"Of course I was; that's the reason I am so dead on the same faults in others. You know the old adage,—reformed thieves make the best detectives; having once been a fool myself makes me more keen upon folly in others. Give me a kiss, old woman, and go and bully that dear girl into good spirits. Such a letter and such a morning are enough to damp the spirits of an undertaker."

"Why an undertaker?"

"Because they are the most cheerful creatures in creation, my queen. People are always what it is their business not to be."

With a nod to his boy—who was listening intently—Mr. Dusart put on his office air of grave dignity, and departed to write a stinging letter to his old schoolfellow and pet crony, Felix Airtton.

Mrs. Dusart hastened to comfort Agnes, whom she found pacing the room, with wide, haggard eyes, and a pitiful quiver about her sweet lips.

Meanwhile, wicked little Freddy was doing penance for her many misdeeds in a sick room. Mrs. Prior had not turned up, and Malcolm lay sick unto death, dependent upon strangers. Freddy tended him with dear devotion; no vigil was too severe to test her patience, and, as she watched and waited for the change to come, she grew from girl to woman, and learnt to love with the full, earnest affection of an ardent nature.

But with her love grew shame for the part she had played, and she ceaselessly recalled

under suffering, and almost lost faith in the Divine compassion which he had relied upon all his life.

When Mrs. Dusart's letter came back, she said to Freddy,—

" You must set your wits to work, Freddy, and find out a way to put matters right between these unhappy young people. You caused the misunderstanding, and you must bring about the reconciliation."

" I will do my very best, I promise you," said Freddy, throwing aside the book she had been reading. " Give me the old address and tell me how to get there; I will manage to find him and explain everything."

" But you do not know London!"

" Well, I can take a cab; or, better still, you might go with me."

This was Saturday night, and Mrs. Dusart could not leave home as she expected some gentlemen to supper.

" We can't go to-night, Freddy, but we can to-morrow. Mr. Dusart found out yesterday the church Felix officiates in now. We'll go to the morning service and wait for him."

So, early the next morning, they took a hansom and started off in search of the young clergyman. It was a delightful morning, sunny and breezy; the City was still with Sabbath tranquillity.

The service had commenced when the ladies reached the suburban church, so they stole in quietly and sat where they could. Felix was giving out the first hymn; it was "Lead, kindly Light." Freddy remembered it was Agnes's favourite hymn, and wondered if Felix remembered it too.

Felix prayed; she thought more fervently than ever; and while the wicked little thing admired his grave, earnest piety, she thanked Heaven she was not to marry a man so like an angel.

After the service Mrs. Dusart asked the verger to show them into the vestry, where they waited for Felix. When he entered he started, and looked a little annoyed; but Freddy said, in her pretty, excited way, that she had come to free Agnes from blame, assuring him that, like Caesar's wife, she was above suspicion.

Felix hastily arrayed himself in his walking clothes, and accompanied his friends to the cozy little house he had hoped would be Agnes's home. Freddy was delighted with the place, and brought a flush to his face by exclaiming,—

" Oh! how all this would have delighted Aggie!"

When they had drank a glass of wine Mrs. Dusart said, laying her hand on Felix's arm,—

" This naughty child has a confession to make, which you must hear without anger, for I have promised, in your name, that she shall not be scolded. Now, Freddy, tell Felix how you personated his betrothed wife in girlish frolic; and make him understand, if you can—men are so dense—that she is innocent of everything he imagines her guilty of."

Freddy turned red, then white, and her voice was very shaky and uncertain; as, without a word to mitigate her wildness, she told him of her freak that had led to such disastrous results.

He heard her in perfect silence, his hands hiding his face, his elbows upon the table. When she had finished he said, softly, " You have wronged your sister deeply, Freddy. I hope this will be a lesson to you, and that in future you will be more trustworthy."

" Come, you must not be cross with the silly child! I said you should not, Felix."

" And I will not, dear old friend. If Agnes can forgive her, surely I can! Come, Freddy, my child, don't cry. I am sorry I spoke severely."

Freddy looked up with an April smile, and looked so prettily penitent that Felix was obliged to kiss her.

" You will go to Agnes soon, Felix," she said, when they shook hands at parting.

" I will write to her to-night and go to her to-morrow."

Agnes was listlessly trying over a new song the next morning in her pretty parlour; the song was "Some day," and the words struck at the centre of her heartache.

Felix, who had entered at the open door unheard, listened to the tender melody, and saw the sunbeams steal to his loved one's face with timid caressing touch; then, in an instant, he was beside her, his arms about her, his kisses upon her lips. And she, poor overwrought little soul, sobbed out all her misery on his faithful heart, and was comforted exceedingly.

Before he left that day she had promised to become his wife in a week, and he was happy.

The morning of the wedding dawned cloudless. Freddy, who had hastened home upon hearing of the coming bridal, was first to get up, and rushing into Agnes room, she said, excitedly, " Wake up, Aggie. Fancy being able to sleep like that upon your wedding morning!"

Aggie sat up and rubbed her eyes. Freddy was perched on the foot of the bed, with fever bright cheeks and eyes full of tears.

" Why, what's the matter, puss; why are you crying?"

" Because, because, I am a selfish, ungrateful girl, and can't bear you to belong to anyone but me. You will never be quite my own again; and Felix thinks me quite too utterly wicked for anything, and won't let you love me much longer."

" Nonsense, dear little sis, you are unjust. Besides, you will be married yourself, soon, and perhaps I shall feel jealous."

" Not you! Besides, I don't feel like getting married; something tells me my life-tides will not continue to run smoothly much longer. I shall live alone here with that stupid servant till I grow grey. But I am a selfish little fool to grumble upon what should be the brightest morning in your life. Forgive me, dear, and believe I wish you every happiness."

Agnes put her arms round Freddy, and said, fondly, " You are a silly, soft-hearted child; you must not be miserable. Felix and I will be away only a month, at the longest, and then you must come and share our home till you have one of your own."

" I am sure I shan't! I should shock Felix out of his senses. Besides, I think married folks ought to live alone. No, if Malcolm don't want me I shall keep on this place here and live alone, and be a daily governess, or else I shall take a situation as resident governess. But don't let us go over the old discussion, dear; get up, breakfast is ready, and there is a lot of things to think about. Mrs. Dusart will be here by the first train."

Agnes rose and threw a pretty morning wrapper round her, then, with her hand in Freddy's, she walked round the little garden to pluck the best of the flowers for the table.

There were to be but few guests—Mr. and Mrs. Dusart, the rector and his wife, and an uncle of the bride—a rich city merchant who had married into society, and was as proud as only a self-made man can be.

Everything was as simple as possible; there had been so little time for preparation; but the bride looked lovely enough for anything in her soft grey satin dress with its simple but costly trimming of real lace. Freddy was very fetching in a cream dress, and plumed hat.

Felix met his bride with a glad, fond welcome. The quiet little town was all astir; a wedding was quite an event, and truly, the bride was worth seeing. Freddy had made her nose quite red crying, so she had to keep smelling her bouquet to hide it.

The ceremony passed off pleasantly, and the bride looked very happy as she signed her name in the vestry, with her tall, young husband beside her. She gave a regretful thought to Madcap Fred, and wished she, too, were as well provided.

After breakfast the bride's uncle said to her: " Shall I invite Freddy to stay with me till

you return from your wedding trip? She seems a bright sort of girl."

" I am afraid she will refuse, uncle. She is mad to be earning her own living, and talks of taking a situation as governess. She has a sweetheart, so I am in hopes all perplexity about her will be ended by marriage. She is dear, good girl, and dearer to me than anyone in the world, except Felix."

Mr. Winter looked thoughtful, he was greatly in need of a refined ladylike girl to train a troublesome little daughter who refused to be polished to the extent her mother desired.

" Do you think she is capable of teaching a girl of twelve how to behave as my daughter should? Jessie, our youngest girl, is a terrible little vixen; she has been spoilt by her mother, and I wish her to become a presentable young lady. Her governess leaves this day three weeks; she is a meek timid creature, but of no use whatever to us."

" I don't know; you had better speak to Freddy. Here she comes."

Freddy heard his pompous offer in silence, her mind full of Malcolm. Surely he could not object, she thought; and it would be so nice to be earning money for herself. So she agreed to accept the offer unless any unforeseen event occurred to alter her plans.

When Agnes went to change her dress Freddy gave her assistance with tears in her eyes; it seemed as if her only friend were leaving her. She clung to her with a sad heartsinking, and said, " Oh, what shall I do without you, Aggie?"

" I hope there will be no need for you to do without me, dear. I shall soon be back, then you shall share my home. You know that next to Felix you are my dearest upon earth."

Aggie kissed the sobbing girl fondly, and said softly, as she smoothed the hair from Freddy's hot forehead with her cool, caressing hand, " Cheer up, pet, and wish me God-speed; Felix is calling me."

Freddy bathed her eyes hastily, and descended to see Agnes off. Rice and slippers were thrown after the happy pair. Freddy sighed and wished she, too, were a bride.

When all the guests had gone there was so much to do to get the house in order that Freddy had no time for brooding. But the next day she felt wretched; it seemed as if the house were empty. She left her breakfast untouched, and putting on her ulster and hat, mounted her tricycle, and spun along the broad sunlit road at fine speed.

The action raised her spirits, and brought a bright colour to her cheeks. After riding about all the morning she stopped at Bramber Castle and inquired if her missing ring had been found, but it had not. The soft air fanned her cheek, and gave her a sense of renewed life; the calm tranquillity of the scene charmed her, and tossing aside her hat she laid down under the shadow of the trees and indulged in a day-dream.

So pleasant were her thoughts, so easy her resting-place, that she fell asleep and slept for hours. When she awoke the sun was fast sinking behind clouds of purple and gold, and she was cramped from her long lying. Springing up she guided her tricycle to the place where refreshments were sold, and buying some cakes and milk made a simple meal before setting out for home.

When she got on her tricycle it was quite the grey of the evening; everything about was refined by the rarefied air, and as she spun along the road Freddy's heart was lightened of its oppression. She felt strangely elated; whistling as she went, she increased her speed, and flew through the cool night air like some gay bird of passage.

When she came into Steyning High-street, she stopped at the queer little shop with the town clock on top of it, and bought some beautiful little fruit pies for her supper. The shop-keeper, a nice, cheerful old lady, noticed her bright looks, and told her she looked bonny.

" I feel bonny," said Freddy, watching the woman weigh a quarter of a pound of toffee. " Do you know, I feel what people call 'fey,' a

sort of inward gladness that is supposed to foretell misfortune."

"A pack of nonsense, Miss Woodgar! Don't let that trouble you; you have a lucky look. The black ox has not trodden on your foot yet; and I hope it may be many a day ere it does. Good night. Mind the juice don't run on to your pretty coat."

When Freddy got home she called the servant to bring a plate and draw a glass of ale for her supper. She still felt that strange lightness of heart that made her voice joyful. The girl, a stupid, country wench, did as desired; then, standing shading the candle with her hand at the open door, she said,—

"A gentleman called to-day and asked for Mrs. Woodgar; I told him she was married but yesterday to Mr. Airtton, and he did seem took aback surely. I thought he was going to be ill, he looked so uncommon bad."

"Did he give his name?"

"No, miss; I never asked him. I told him the missus had gone to Scotland; and, if you please, miss, he said, 'Heaven forgive her—I cannot.'"

"A light seemed to break upon Freddy's brain; hastily showing the girl a photograph, she said,—

"Was he like this?"

"Exactly, miss."

Freddy's heart sank. "How long he has been gone?"

"About half-an-hour, miss."

"Give me my hat; there is a horrible mistake."

With shaking hands Freddy put on her hat, and flew out of the house like a mad thing. The girl looked after her in amazement.

"Well, I never did, surely. First he, then she, in their tantrums. Well, a wedding do seem, like a thunderstorm, to turn everything sour!" said the girl, shutting the door after her mistress with a vexed looked.

The moon had not risen, and the streets, which were innocent of gas, were dim and shadowy as Freddy flew along in mad haste. The wind had sprung up and blew in her face as she pressed on, feeling as she supposed Alice did in Wonderland, when the Red Queen kept urging her to fly, "faster! faster! faster!"

Freddy wanted to get to the station in time for the last train to town. She guessed Malcolm would leave by that. She was in wretched suspense; she dreaded his going away under the impression that she, instead of Agnes, had been married. She saw it all, now: Malcolm, impatient for a reply to his last letter—which she had neglected to answer through being taken up with Agnes's affairs—had hastened to her to know the reason of his letter remaining unacknowledged, and had been met with the tidings of Aggie's marriage; and believing his girl love to be the widow, of course he went away with the notion that she was false to him.

Fast as she flew she reached the station only in time to see the train steaming away. She sank down on a seat breathless, and an official seeing her said, kindly, "Did you want to go by that train, miss? It was the last to London to-night."

Tears were in Freddy's eyes, and her voice was unsteady as she gasped, "No, I did not want to go by it. I wanted to see a gentleman who went in it; in fact, I have a message for him."

"There were only two passengers from here, miss—one, a young girl, the other, a gentleman, tall and pale. Will you send a telegram?"

"No, thanks, I will write when I get home. Can you get me a stamp?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then please do."

When the man had gone Freddy paced the platform in a miserable state of excitement. "She was absurdly upset," she told herself; "a letter would explain everything." But the aches at her heart and trouble in her mind were not to be easily put aside. She bitterly re-

proached herself for not having explained matters before.

When the man returned, she thanked him, took the stamp, and hastened home to write to Malcolm. Not knowing any other address she sent her letter to his uncle's country-seat where he had been staying.

A few days later she had a cold, little letter from Mrs. Prior saying her son was in Paris, and that Freddy's letters would be forwarded when she knew his address. Freddy threw the letter down in a passion, and remembering the delay caused by letters not reaching Felix Airtton, she said, "Botheration take the letters, they seem to have the power of evil in league against them!"

At first she thought she would write another letter to Mrs. Prior, but the cold tone of that lady's epistle set her against the idea.

She did not know that Malcolm had written to his mother a hasty account of his sweetheart's supposed faithlessness, or that the good mother had thrown her letter aside, supposing it to be some paltry excuse for her fickleness.

So when a note came from Mr. Winter calling her to town she went at once, leaving strict instructions with the servant that all letters were to be forwarded to her quickly. The little house was shut up, the maid going in daily to see that all was safe; and Freddy, with a heavy heart, started for the great city.

Mr. Winter met her himself and took her to his grand house in a carriage and pair. To Freddy's surprise Mrs. Winter totally ignored all family connection, and treated her at once as an employee. This roused Freddy's ire at once; she was a proud girl, and did not readily submit to being sat upon even by so imposing a person as the Juno-like Mrs. Winter.

For Aggie's sake she determined to bear the trying position for a time; but she found it hard when a girl of her own age gave her the cold shoulder. Miss Rose Winter was not a bad-hearted girl, but she had been well iced by her mother's idea of what was due to her as her daughter. The child Freddy was supposed to instruct proved to be a source of real wretchedness to sunny-natured Freddy. Many were the battles royal they had before the first week was out.

Mrs. Winter, who had never really liked the idea of Freddy's becoming one of them, took the child's part, and so made matters worse.

The home of the Winters was at Hampshead, near the Heath, a pretty place called "The Birches." It was Freddy's greatest delight to slip away to the windy heath, and wander about in restless freedom. One day when she had strolled too far for the leisure allowed her, she hastened back in breathless haste, sure of a scolding from the severe Mrs. Winter, who delighted in timing everybody to a second, and scolding them for hours if they were late.

The girl was feeling heart-sick with suspense, for as yet she had received no tidings from Malcolm Prior. Life at The Birches was becoming insufferable; for a fat-faced person Rose particularly affected had proved as cruelly fickle as less godly men, and professed an admiration for jolly little Fred, who had found in him her only friend in her new life.

When she reached home Mrs. Winter was crossing the hall, and paused to say, severely,—

"Miss Woodgar, you really take liberties. I told you to return by five at the latest, and you have presumed to dispute my authority by remaining out till six, an offence my own daughter would not dare to be guilty of. Please oblige me by dressing quickly, and come down to the drawing-room; we have visitors, and as Rose has sprained her wrist I rely upon you to give us some music."

Freddy's cheeks were crimson, and her heart hot with rebellious pride. She was never asked to appear before guests except when she

could be of use, and this evening she felt unequal to stand being snubbed in public.

"Pray excuse me to-night, Mrs. Winter," she said; "really my head aches so badly I only feel fit to be alone."

Mrs. Winter favoured her with a cold stare, and, drawing up her train of pale primrose satin, she said, haughtily,—

"'Tis my wish that you come down, Miss Woodgar, and please be properly dressed; one would think we paid you poorly to see the dowdy clothes you wear."

Before Freddy could answer she had entered the drawing-room, and was blandly talking to her guests.

Freddy, the wicked little rebel, felt her temper rising. "A worm will turn," she muttered to herself, "so this poor grub shall show herself a butterfly. Not dress decently, indeed! I'll let them see! I wonder how they'll like me when I am 'properly dressed.'"

Hastily flying to her room she threw open a wardrobe and snatched out the dress she had worn at Aggie's wedding, a cream-tinted dream of a dress—which displayed her many charms to perfection. Quickly arraying herself, she hunted up some coquettish crimson satin slippers, a crimson fan, some coral and dull gold bracelets, and stood confessed a perfect little beauty. Her starry eyes were ablaze with excitement, her vivid lips parted with a saucy smile, and she imagined Mrs. Winter's horror at her brilliant appearance.

"I wish I had some flowers," she thought.

Then there flashed before her the recollection of six pots of sturdy geraniums that stood on the sills of the windows of her room. Providing herself with scissors, she cut off the best blossoms and fixed them in a huge, vivid cluster on one shoulder. The graceful folds of her nun's-veil dress, and its handsome lace trimming, fell about her pretty form in a pearly-tinted cloud. In all her lonely life she had never looked more beautiful.

"I do not look like one born to wear the willow for any man. I'll begin afresh to-night, and get all the fun I can out of life. No more 'worm in the bud' business! I'll leave this drudgery and start on a new track. Mrs. Winter may find somebody else to bully; and as for Rose, I'll flirt with every man I find her interested in."

With this resolve she descended to the drawing-room. The butler who passed her in the hall paused, and fairly gasped at the radiant vision; and when she entered the drawing-room a group of gentlemen who stood near the door stared in surprised admiration, and wondered who was the girl with the starry eyes and exultant look.

Mrs. Winter, who was talking behind a huge feather fan to a favourite crony, allowed it to fall into her lap with the word "Preposterous."

Rose, in a sea green satin dress which she had discovered, too late, made her look sallow, felt her face crimson as a young fellow she rather liked said, "What a lovely little woman! Who is she? Pray introduce me; I never saw a more fetching face!"

"She is only our governess. Of course I'll introduce you, but I am afraid you will be disappointed in her; she is not so bright as she looks."

But the young fellow decided, when he had been chatting with Freddy five minutes, that this assertion of Rose's was all "bosh." Freddy fairly bubbled over with fun; her audacious speeches took the young fellow by storm. One by one the most desirable among the men, attracted by her low, sweet laughter, merry looks and extreme prettiness, got introduced to her, and to Mrs. Winter's chagrin the despised dependant was the belle of the evening.

Mr. Winter added to his wife's annoyance by introducing her himself to some of the guests as a family connection.

In vain Mrs. Winter placed the incorrigible little beauty as far away as possible from temptation; but, like the butterfly she was, she found sunny speeches for a bald-headed statesman beside her, who for the first time in his

hostess's knowledge really seemed to enjoy himself. Mrs. Winter fairly jumped when she heard the great man laugh, and saw him bend over Freddy with quite an air of devotion.

One or two witty sallies floated from Freddy's saucy lips to Mrs. Winter's scandalised ears. But she confessed to herself that never before had a dinner of hers passed off so well, or her male guests seemed so pleased. She had no opportunity of reproofing Freddy, for one of the gentlemen, who was a great swell in his way, took it into his head to follow Freddy into the drawing-room. The little witch made him welcome, and they seemed so well pleased with each other that Mrs. Winter, out of sheer aggravation, asked Freddy to play.

Still in her feverishly gay mood Freddy played "My Queen Waltz," a tune that fetched the young folks about her, and made them whisper among themselves that it set their feet aching to dance. Then she sang a saucy little French chanson with so much spirit that a buzz of delighted admiration arose at the finish.

Just as the last "Tral la la" rippled from her ripe lips a servant entered and whispered to his mistress,—

"A gentleman is waiting to see Miss Woodgar."

Thinking it might be some country cousin who would put Freddy to the blush—for the lady had but a poor opinion of her husband's connections—she said, with a slow smile, "Show the gentleman in here, Roberts; Miss Woodgar is too much engaged to be disturbed. 'Tis very late for anyone to presume to call upon her."

An encore of Freddy's last verse was insisted upon, and while the gay refrain filled the room Malcolm Prior entered in what he would term "full fig." Very handsome and distinguished he looked, quite unabashed by the gay company, while he bent before the hostess who felt from courtesy compelled to receive him properly.

A lady of title to whom Mrs. Winter toadied, said, gushingly,—

"Oh, Mr. Prior, this is an unexpected pleasure! I have been longing to tell you how your academy gem delighted me. Everyone raves about it!"

Malcolm thanked her for her appreciation; then, apologizing to his hostess for his intrusion, he said,—

"Will you permit me to speak to Miss Woodgar alone? I have come with a message from my mother, who is ill."

Mrs. Winter, thawed by the warmth of her titled friend, said, blandly,—

"Certainly; I will lead you to her. See how the moths flutter round the flame of beauty."

Just as Freddy wheeled round on her stool declaring she would not sing another note her exultant eyes met those of Malcolm. A slight shiver ran through her frame and her face went white.

One of her admirers whispered merrily,—

"My ghost at your wedding,
Shall sit by your side."

"You look as if your friend were come to take you 'down among the dead men, down, down, down.'"

Freddy shook her head, and said calmly, as she put a little cold hand in her lover's,—

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Prior. How is your mother?"

"Ill and anxious to see you. I came to ask your friends to spare you to us. Dare I hope Mrs. Winter will excuse you?"

His voice was calm and courteous; no one would have suspected that his heart beat madly with a passionate longing to snatch her to his heart before them all.

Freddy read the smouldering fire in his eyes aright, and putting her hand on his she said, softly,—

"I am afraid you are in great trouble. I will not detain you, I am ready."

Some one brought a warm wrap, and Freddy put it on mechanically; she seemed moving in

a dream. A bitter, sweet feeling, half pain, half pleasure, stirred her heart, Malcolm looked so grave.

"I have a carriage waiting," he whispered; and she allowed him to lead her away from the gay company. After handing her into the carriage Malcolm sprang in with one word, "home."

Then, clasping her close he said, rapturously, "Oh! my love, at last I have found you. What a miserable blunder it has all been!"

Freddy nestled closer, and said reproachfully,—

"How could you believe me false to you, dear, knowing how I loved you?"

"You darling to come to me so forgivingly, Poor mother is ill, and so anxious to see you, dear. I wrote to her saying you had married someone else; and thinking your letter would only inflame my suffering, she kept it till I came home, which I did only yesterday. I got your new address from your old servant. Mother is so awfully upset that she has added to our trouble by delaying the letter containing your explanation, and cannot rest till she has seen you and asked your forgiveness. Oh! my treasure, that letter has made me so very, very happy! To tell the truth I was always insanely jealous of the dead man I believed to be your husband. It is so good to know I shall be the first and, please Heaven, the only one to call you wife! Have you been comfortable at the Winters', dearest?"

"Not very. Perhaps it has been my own fault; I could not be happy anywhere without you."

"Ah! my pet, you shall never leave me again! You shall stay with the master till we are married, and we will be married as soon as possible."

The carriage stopped before a substantial red brick mansion in old Kensington, and Malcolm hastened Freddy in.

She was surprised at the air of wealth the place had; she had imagined the Prior's homely sort of people.

Without delay Freddy went to Mrs. Prior's room.

The old lady was bolstered up in bed, her quakerish cap tied neatly over her smooth hair.

Her pleasant old face was pale and pinched by sickness.

Freddy took her hand reverently and raised it to her lips.

A good mother seemed to her something almost holy.

"My dear little daughter, can you forgive a poor old busybody who made mischief innocently, and with the best intentions imaginable? My son stormed at me like a madman about it, and really I deserved the rebuke."

Freddy looked reproachfully at Malcolm, who was stooping over his mother to whisper how grieved to think he had been angry with her.

"My mother has forgiven me."

"Of course," said Mrs. Prior. "What cannot a mother pardon is an only son?"

"I see nothing that you have done to me for which you need ask pardon," said Freddy. "If you will try to love me a little you will make me very happy."

"I shall find that easy, my child, since Malcolm loves you so much."

"And you will let me stay and take care of you and learn to be, indeed, a daughter?"

"If such a silly old sick woman will not weary you, dear."

For answer Freddy kissed her cheek; and Malcolm, seeing these two, who were his heart's dearest, becoming such good friends, was grateful to his sweetheart for her tact and kindness.

Weeks flew on, time flies so fast when one is happy; and Mrs. Prior was about again, a little feeble, and dependent upon Freddy, who had proved a tender nurse. And this dependence made Freddy very proud. Malcolm said she was getting quite authoritative with them all, and he must teach her her proper place by making her swear to love, honour, and obey him.

So there was a quiet wedding in a pretty peaceful old church.

The clergyman who officiated was Felix Aiston, to whom Mrs. Prior and her rich old brother Dick became afterwards greatly attached; so much so that Uncle Dick presented him with a fat living in a delightful country town where Agnes made a sweet Lady Bountiful, and was very happy in her beautiful home.

Uncle Dick declared Malcolm his heir, and made him a handsome allowance.

Freddy made a capital wife, and was very fond and proud of her artist husband, who was fast becoming famous, and neither had cause to regret "Freddy's Folly."

[THE END.]

SOUTHPORT, "the pride of Lancashire," bears the proud distinction of having doubled its population twice within twenty years. The place is remarkable for its salubrity, cleanliness, well-built houses, beautiful grounds, and charming pleasure resorts. The death-rate last year was only 13·0 per 1,000, and the resident doctors are beginning to complain that the town is dreadfully healthy.

COMMON ERRORS.—Many wise sayings are incorrectly quoted. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," was long attributed to the Psalms of David, until oft-repeated corrections have convinced people that the sentiment belongs to Maria in Laurence Sterne's "Sentimental Journey." The epigram, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," is still often quoted as one of the Proverbs of Solomon, and it is rarely attributed to its author, Butler (see "Hudibras," Part II., canto 2, line 843). The nearest approach to any such phrase to be found in the Bible is the text, "He who spares the rod hathet his son" (Prov. xiii. 24). The reference to "pouring oil on troubled waters" is often supposed to be scriptural, though the Bible does not make any such allusion. "Man wants but little here below," is an expression no older than Goldsmith's "Hermit," though it is generally quoted either as Scripture or from a line of an ancient hymn.

MR. MUCKLE.

THE other night Captain Muckle went home intoxicated. After going to bed he made so many strange noises that Mrs. Muckle became alarmed. Muckle told her that he must have been attacked by brain fever. The poor woman became so badly frightened that after Muckle sank into a muttering sleep she made a mustard plaster and put it on the back of his neck. Muckle finally became quiet, and Mrs. Muckle sank to sleep, leaving the plaster on her husband's neck. During the night the plaster was displaced, but when Muckle awoke next morning his neck was so sore he could scarcely turn his head.

Mrs. Muckle, ashamed of what she had done, was determined not to say anything about the plaster, and fearful that her husband would mention the unskillfully attended application, she sat at the breakfast table with downcast expression.

"This place on my neck hurts like the deuce," said Muckle.

"Now I'll catch it," thought his wife; but Muckle continued,—

"Strangest thing in the world how this thing happened. I was standing at the corner of the street yesterday afternoon, talking to a gentleman on business, when along came a timber waggon loaded with timber. A long board, which I did not happen to notice, stuck out about ten feet behind, and while I was deeply interested the waggon turned the corner, and the long board came around and scraped the back of my neck. I hope that the time will come when the people will arise and denounce such nuisances."

Muckle is a terrible fibber, and his wife is losing confidence in him.

FACETIES.

THEY say that money does not bring happiness. This is an experiment, however, which everyone wishes to try for himself.

"MAMMA, the teacher says all people are made of dust."—"Yes, my dear, so they are."—"Well, then, I suppose negroes are made of coal-dust, ain't they?"

A MAN who has been boasting of the numerous foreign places he has seen, was asked if he had ever seen Lusitania?—"No," said Jack; "what country does she live in?"

SAID a miserable little boy, who had just received a scolding from his father, "Ma, I wish I'd never been born." "Why, Charley?"—"Well, I think I'd a been a better boy."

THERE was a very little boy wading up to his knees, almost, in the slush, when a passing gentleman said to him: "Why ain't you in school, young man?" "Cos I've got the hoopin' cough," he exclaimed.

"MRS. MURKIN," said a visitor, "Emma has your features, but I think she's got her father's hair." "Oh, now I see," said the dear little Emma: "it's because I have papa's hair that he had to wear a wig!"

"HANNY, you ought not to throw away nice bread like that; you may want it, some day, perhaps." "Well, mother, should I stand any better chance of getting it then if I ate it now?"

A BOY who was called up by his teacher for giving a schoolmate a black eye, pleaded that he only threw a bit of water at him, but on being pressed in the cross-examination, he at last admitted that the water was frozen.

A WOMAN sued for a divorce because her husband kissed the servant girl. "You want this man punished?" asked the judge. "I do," said she. "Then," said the judge, "I shall not divorce you from him."

SERGEANT K., having made two or three mistakes while conducting a cause, petulantly exclaimed, "I seem to be inoculated with dulness to-day." "Inoculated, brother?" said Erskine. "I thought you had it in the natural way."

A BARRISTER, in replying to his antagonist in Court, said "he had a keen rapier with which to pierce all fools and knaves," whereupon his opponent "moved the Court" that the rapier be taken from him, lest he should commit suicide.

"I saw, Paddy, that is the worst looking horse that I have ever seen in harness. Why don't you fatten him up?" "Fat him up, is it? Faix, the poor baste can scarcely carry the little mate that's on him now!" replied Paddy.

A FRENCH officer said to a Swiss colonel, "How is it that your countrymen always fight for money, while we French always fight for honour?" The Swiss shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I suppose it is because people are apt to fight for that which they need most."

A LADY, who had company to tea, reproved her little son several times, very gently. At last, out of patience, she said, sharply, "Jimmy, if you don't keep still, I'll send you from the table!" Looking at her in surprise, he asked, "Didn't you forget to use your company voice then, mother?"

A MAN in New Brunswick, having no weapon and being attacked by a bear, struck him with a bottle of kerosene oil, which broke, and the contents ran down the animal like the oil on Aaron's beard. The bear, not minding this at all, sprang at him and began hugging him, when the man taking a match from his pocket set fire to the bear. All but the head and shoulders were soon consumed, when, in order to save the snout and get the bounty, the man carried water in his hat and put out the flames. A newspaper heads this "A Tough Bear Story."

A COUNTRYMAN came to London a few days ago, and at night stayed in apartments. Not knowing how to turn off the gas he blew it out. Next morning he was found dead in his bed. "What a sad event!" someone exclaimed to the landlady. "I should say it was," she replied. "Over 1,000 feet of gas wasted!"

A LITTLE girl was asked by her mother on her return from church how she liked the preacher. " Didn't like him at all," was the reply. "Why?" asked her mother. " 'Cause he preached till he made me sleepy, and then hollered so loud that he wouldn't let me go to sleep."

EDWIN JAMES, examining a witness, asked him what his business was. He answered, "A dealer in iron." "Then," said the counsel, "you must of course be a thief." "I don't see," replied the witness, "why a dealer in iron must necessarily be a thief, more than a dealer in brass."

"I've lost a patient," said a doctor, sitting down to a dinner-table, with a frown on his face as dark as a gunpowder position. "I am sorry to hear it. Man or woman?" asked one of the boarders. "Man." "When did he die?" "Die, hang him, he's not dead." He stopped taking my medicine, got well, and ran away without paying the bill."

WOMAN'S RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES.—Elderly Spinner (who is being measured for a pair of boots)—"And mind that you make one larger than the other." Attendant (with astonishment)—"Then they won't be follows, m'am!" E.S. (with asperity)—"Certainly not; I do not like fellows, and I will have nothing whatever to do with them!"

SHE wore an intellectual look, and as she came up the street talking with her companion the strolling passer-by said to himself, "She is discussing Plato, or quoting Mill." And as she came nearer her face brightened with a new animation, and she was heard to say, "Yea, just a yard and three-quarters in the train."

THEY were talking about dogs—the habits, comparative intelligence, &c., of those sagacious animals—when young Rutherford said, "Well, sir, my dog's a dandy, he is. You ought to just see him sometimes. Honestly, I believe he has more sense than I have." "That's a very doubtful compliment for the dog," said old Mr. Gloomy, who sat over in a corner.

A SUNDREDLY rich and very muscular young man stopped at an hotel the other day, for the first time, and had great difficulty in getting anything to eat. A sympathizing stranger at his elbow whispered, "You will starve here if you don't tip the waiter." Two minutes afterwards the waiter found himself tipped over on the floor. The young man did not starve.

A WELL-KNOWN city man, whose idiosyncrasy is that of becoming intoxicated and going to bed with his clothes on, was surprised with the following, the other morning, from his wife: "You were not so bad, as usual last night, Henry, dear, were you?" "Well, I don't know," said he; "what makes you think so?" "Why," she replied, "I see you took your overcoat off before you went to bed."

NOR LARGE ENOUGH.—In response to an inquiry for court-plaster, the other day, a chemist handed out a piece about six inches square, and asked the boy if he thought that would do. "I dunno," was the doubtful reply. "Who is it for?" "For father." " Didn't he say how large a piece?" "No; but I know that isn't half large enough. Ma hit him with the whole side of the ironing-board at once, and that won't begin to cover the clip!"

"WELL," said a Yankee, proudly, to a travelling Scot, as they stood by the Falls of Niagara, "is not that wonderful? In your country, you never saw any thing like that!" "Like that?" quoth the latter; "there's far more wonderful concern nae two miles frae whar I was born." "Indeed," says Jonathan; "and pray what kind of a concern may it be?" "Why, mon," replied the other, "it's a peacock wi' a wooden leg!"

WHEN a clock is accused of being behind time there is something wrong on the face of it.

"You have been up before me half a dozen times this year," said a justice, severely, to a local vagrant. "Come now, Judge, none of that. Every time I've been here I've seen you here. You are here more than I am. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

ONE day we had some Dutch cheese on the table, and I asked Mary if she would have some. She answered, "If you please." Willie, two years younger, was asked the same question. He didn't want any, but wishing to be as polite as his cousin, made a low bow and said, "If you not please."

"I should so like to have a coin dated the year of my birth," said a maiden lady of uncertain age to a male acquaintance. "Do you think you could get one for me?" "I am afraid not," he replied. "These very old coins are only to be found in valuable collections." And yet he cannot see why, when he met the lady the next day, she didn't speak to him.

"I don't believe in this learning German, Spanish, French, or any foreign language," said a country man the other day. "Why, I lived among a lot of Germans, and got along with them just as well as if I had known their language; but I didn't—not a word of it." "How did you contrive it?" "Why, you see, they understood mine."

NOR SO HANDY.—An old bachelor, who wanted to ingratiate himself with a rich widow, presented her with a lap-dog, saying: "I have trained him so perfectly that he will eat off your hand." "Eat off my hand!" exclaimed the widow. "I don't want my hand eaten off; and you needn't think of getting it in that way."

PRESERVATION OF A FAVOURITE MINISTER.—A minister was called in to see a man who was very ill. After finishing his visit, as he was leaving the house, he said to the man's wife: "My good woman, do you not go to any church at all?" "Oh, yes, sir; we gang to the Barony Kirk." "Then why in the world did you send for me? Why didn't you send for Dr. Macleod?" "Na, na, sir; 'deed no. We wadna risk him. Da ye no ken it's a dangerous case o' typhus?"

IT took the boys all one Saturday to do it, but they searched through the bushels of chestnuts in their parents' barns and got out a quart, every chestnut of which was wormy. And the next Monday morning they took these chestnuts to school and left them on the teacher's desk, and the latter cracked chestnuts, looked at them and threw them away pretty much all the forenoon before he came to realize the situation, and then he was so mad he lost a pound in weight.

THE old Judge, who has always been looked upon as the possessor of an iron constitution, calls upon his doctor: "You here?" says the physician, in astonishment; "what can be the matter?" "Well, doctor, the fact is that I am getting to be a little uneasy about the state of my health." "Ah! and where is the trouble? In the head? Stomach?" "No, they're all right, but of late I have been suffering a good deal from sleeplessness—in court."

"SPEAKING of owing men and feeling unpleasant whenever you meet them," said Colonel Smith, "brings up a rather pleasant remembrance of a man to whom I was indebted. There were numerous men who had financial claims on me, and whenever I met them I could not help but feel a sort of shiver creep over me, but there was one man whom I liked to meet." " Didn't bring up any unpleasant memory, eh?" said Paxton, who owes nearly every man in town. "No, sir." " Didn't shudder when you met him in the street?" "No; I'd walk past him as though I owned the street." "I suppose you knew, then, that he did not need the money?" "No, sir, for I was well aware that he did need it." "Well, what was the cause?" "He was blind."

SOCIETY.

LADY BRASSET has presented two Indian leopards to the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park.

The Prince of Wales has promised to lay the foundation stone of the new Indian Institute at Oxford University, and also expressed his intention of dropping in on his brother Savages, at their club-house in the Savoy, some time during the month of February.

Mrs. MACKAY, wife of the Californian millionaire, a lady well known in society, has so far recovered from her severe illness that she has removed from Paris to Mentone.

The Emperor of Germany has already received from England upwards of four hundred pounds in aid of the afflicted Rhinelanders, many of whom are homeless and quite destitute.

The Duke and Duchess of Albany will in future use Buckingham Palace as their town residence. They purpose staying there now until after the duchess's confinement, which is shortly expected.

The festivities in honour of Lady Brooke's coming of age, which have extended over some considerable time, were suddenly put a stop to in consequence of the death of his lordship's grandfather, the aged Earl of Wemyss.

The State apartments at Windsor Castle are again open to the public by the express wish of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, who are residing in the Lancaster Tower, which adjoins Her Majesty's private apartments.

Lord Rowton has been staying for a few days again with the Queen at Osborne, and spent there the anniversary of the lamented Lord Beaconsfield's birth, which occurs on the last day of the old year.

The young princes, Albert Victor and George of Wales, after paying a visit to the Queen at Osborne, went back with their tutor, the Rev. J. N. Dalton, to Lausanne, as it was considered expedient for them to return there, even after other plans had been formed.

The Duchess of Argyll has much improved in health since she arrived at Cannes, and is now able to join the family circle at meals, and to take carriage and gentle pedestrian exercise when the weather permits. The Villa Anson, which was built by the first husband of the duchess, is charmingly and picturesquely situated, besides being a commodious and large building.

As the rumour that it was the intention of the Queen to visit the South of France early in March has been contradicted, it is probable that two Drawing Rooms will be held before Easter, one at the end of February, and the other about the middle of March. Easter Sunday falls unusually early this year (March 25th), and when this is the case a long and lively London season may be expected.

The Queen is probably still in blissful ignorance of the fact that on her visit to Netley in December she personally wounded one of her own gallant defenders, as in pinning a medal to the nightshirt of an invalid hero she pinned in a portion of the hero with it. The brave soldier, who had faced Egyptian bayonets, did not flinch under a pin-prick, however, but bore it with Spartan firmness, for, as he afterwards remarked, "Bless her! her words were so gracious that I couldn't mind it!"

Every bedroom at Envile Hall, one of the seats of Lord Stamford, has a perfect toilet set of Queen Anne silver; at Dunham Massey, another of his places, the feeders and fire-irons in all the reception-rooms are likewise of solid silver of Queen Anne date. One of Lord Stamford's ancestors, who had a mania for that precious metal, stipulated in his will that a large sum of money should be yearly spent in silver ornaments; it was eventually deemed expedient to procure an Act of Parliament to put a stop to such an act of folly.

STATISTICS.

THE NATIONAL DEBT IN GOLD AND SILVER.—IN WEIGHT AND LENGTH.—Its weight in gold would be 6,282 tons; in silver, 120,000 tons; its transportation in gold would require twenty-six ships of 250 tons each; 12,581 horse carts, each carrying half-a-ton, and forming a procession of twenty-five miles in length, or 281,769 soldiers, each carrying 50 lbs.; in sovereigns, piled one upon another, they would be 710 miles in height; laying them side by side and touching each other they would form a chain of gold of 11,048 miles in length, or nearly twice the circumference of the moon.

POPULATION.—The following will not be out of place at the present time of a new year, showing the date of the most recent census in the principal countries of the civilised world, with the result:—France (1881) 37,821,186, Prussia (1880) 27,279,111, Saxony (1880) 2,092,805, Bavaria (1880) 5,284,778, Wurtemburg (1880) 1,971,118, Baden (1880) 1,570,254, Austria (1880) 22,144,244, Hungary (1880) 15,725,710, Belgium (1879) 5,533,654, Holland (1879) 4,012,693, Switzerland (1880) 2,846,102, Sweden (1880) 4,565,668, Norway (1878) 1,878,100, Spain (1877) 16,625,860, Italy (1879) 28,437,091, Russia in Europe (1879) 83,626,590, England and Wales (1881) 25,968,286, Scotland (1881) 8,734,370, Ireland (1881) 5,159,839, United States (1880) 50,155,782.

GEMS.

FAITH is simple, it is to believe; faith is sub-lime, it is to be born again.

MAINTAIN silence till speech is of use; then speak to the point.

VANITY keeps persons in favour with themselves, who are out of favour with all others.

NURTURE your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes.

If we had no faults we should not take so much pleasure in noticing them in others.

The great secret how to write well is to know thoroughly what one writes about, and not to be affected.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PUNCH (MILK).—Peel off the rind of twelve lemons, two Seville oranges, and one Tangerine; steep them for two days in half a bottle of rum, add the juice of the lemons, 2lb. of sifted sugar, one nutmeg (grated), and a little finely-powdered cinnamon and mace, one quart of water, one and a half bottles of rum, and one of brandy; mix, add one quart of boiling milk, let it stand a couple of hours, strain through a jelly bag till quite clear, and bottle for use.

A very dainty dish for luncheon, supper, or to tempt the capricious appetite of a convalescent, is stuffed potatoes. Neither are they especially difficult to do, requiring only a little additional care, but they are so nice when done that the extra care is compensated for. Select potatoes of an equal size—they should be rather large than otherwise—bake them, and, when done and still hot, cut off a small piece from the end of each potato, taking care that the edges are left smooth and neat; scoop out the inside without breaking the skins, mash and mix with it half the quantity of cooked meat, highly seasoned, and finely chopped. Fill the skins a little above the edge, place in an earthen dish and set in the oven to brown the tops. Any kind of meat may be used; the seasoning should be to the taste. Potted and deviled ham are sometimes used, and they certainly make the dish very palatable. Sausage meat is also used, these, of course, when one is in a hurry, or does not care for the trouble of preparing the meat.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TRUE hope is based on energy of character. A strong mind always hopes and has always cause to hope, because it knows the mutability of human affairs, and how slight a circumstance may change the whole course of events.

Though you may sleep all day the sun still shines. Though to you the mountains may be draped in mists it has not unloosened its granite roofs. Though you may be caught amid the swirling snows the spring is hastening on.

ESTIMATE not the man who boasts of his universal and impartial love. He who has no special fondness for country or friend has seldom much of either. In other words, the man who likes every place and every person the same loves no person and no place at all.

TAN modest deportment of those who are truly wise, when contrasted with the assuming air of the young and ignorant, may be compared to the different appearances of wheat, which, while its ear is empty, holds up its head proudly, but as soon as it is filled with grain, bends modestly.

THE body is a tool of the spirit, and, if we keep it in imperfect condition, how shall either soul or intellect do good work with it? Happiness and usefulness are not indeed impossible without physical health; but they are of very difficult attainment, and of very unreliable quality.

THE "bustle" or "dress improver" is, it appears, not an invention of civilised dress-makers; at least, it is worn by the brown beauties of Axim, on the African Gold Coast. It is usually "a mere bundle of cloth; on dress occasions it is a pad or cushion!" This is from Captain Burton's "To the Gold Coast for Gold."

THE proverb tells us that idle persons can never find time for anything; and the reason is that they have always a huge bundle of arrears to engross their attention. They can do little or nothing because they are always intending to do a vast deal, or, more strictly speaking, because they have always a vast deal waiting to be done.

THE White Horse Cellar in Piccadilly is to be pulled down and replaced by a large hotel. It was one of the old coaching inns, and so described by Dickens in one of his novels, and also by Fielding in one of his. At present it seems somewhat out of place in so thoroughly modernized a neighbourhood. It is still a great resort of judges of horseflesh and sporting characters generally, who, no doubt, will lament its intended transmogrification.

ONE of the most wonderful sights in the world is just now to be seen at the residence of Mr. Siemens, the great electrician, at Tunbridge Wells. Here does the great *savant* pursue his studies, the result of which is said to be prodigious. The experiment of coloured light by electricity has proved highly successful, and the rich colouring of the fruit and flowers in the orchard, house, and conservatory realises the magic gardens of the Arabian Nights. But the greatest wonder of all is the artificial moon, which rises at its allotted time and lights up the whole building with its radiance.

THE proposal that officers should wear their medals with evening dress has now been thoroughly discussed, and it would seem popular opinion is completely in favour of the proceeding. One fraction of the courage that won the honourable distinction is only necessary to make the movement a success; but the bravest are often the social cowards—or, rather, let us say, maiden-modest and bashful. There can be no doubt of the propriety when we remember that it is a Court custom. Let it, however, be a miniature medal of the lump of silver, for that would be often in the way, and always in a waltz be hitting the nose of the fair partner.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B. L.—It is customary to bow to a person when you meet in the street, even if you have met only a half-hour before.

S. N. A.—If a woman finds it necessary to postpone her marriage to the man to whom she is engaged she should certainly tell him the reason why.

L. G. P.—A delicate and delicious perfume is made as follows:—Dissolve half an ounce of pure neroli in one pint of rectified spirits, and add an ounce of violet.

EDWARD.—You had better win your parents' consent to your acquaintance with this gentleman first. If he is a proper young man they will not continue their objections to him so long.

LISABE R.—We do not think that the young man visits either of you as a suitor, or that he is at all in love. You had better restrain the ardour of your feelings until you have some reason to believe that you have a serious admirer.

S. R. F.—From the description given of your complexion, colour of hair and eyes, &c., we are constrained to say that all colours, with the exception of a very light shade of pink or blue, will prove suitable for your dresses, and serve to enhance your style of beauty.

FUNERAL.—The plural of the word *turkey* is written *turkeys*, according to the following rule of orthography: “Nouns of the singular number ending in *ey* form their plural by adding *s* only to the singular,” and not, as you erroneously suppose, by changing *ey* into *ies*.

A. D.—The alloy called *pinchbeck* derives its name from being brought into notice by a person named *Pinchbeck*. It may be made by combining three ounces of zinc with a pound of copper. It was formerly used to make the cases of watches and brooch settings.

LILLIE.—All young ladies in such perilous circumstances should go to their parents. Your mother is your best adviser. You had better cease writing to the young gentleman, and give your whole mind to your duties. Your writing and spelling are fair. Strive to improve.

S. Y.—The death-rate is much higher in Italy, Austria, Spain, and Prussia, than in France or England, while the mortality of the most northern countries of Europe—Denmark and Sweden—is less by ten per cent. than in Great Britain, and fifty per cent. lower than in Italy or Austria.

T. R. S.—We know of nothing better for the hair than castor oil and brandy—three ounces of oil and one ounce of brandy. Mix it thoroughly and apply to the hair, rubbing it well into the roots at least twice a week. We have no preference for any of the advertised specifics.

A. R.—The usual first attention offered to a young lady by the family of her fiancé is a family dinner party. This is somewhat trying, particularly if she has not met the family before except in those formal first calls which his father, mother, brothers, and sisters make upon her. However, good-feeling and cordiality will soon bridge over these beginnings.

ELDER SON.—The best course for you to take is to seek an interview with the young lady's parents, and give them a full account of yourself and your circumstances and intentions. If you can win them over you will find little difficulty in your wooing. If you do not succeed in this you will have great trouble in winning your bride.

M. R.—Possibly the young lady thinks that you should propose. She is in doubt as to your intentions. Our advice to you is to offer her your hand in marriage at once. If you are accepted, then acquaint her parents with the state of affairs, and get their consent and approval. We think that in this way you will find a solution of your perplexity.

J. B. T.—It may not be necessary for a gentleman to raise his hat when speaking to a lady, or at any other time, but it is customary for him to do so in every instance, and only shows good manners and an indication of gentle breeding: to neglect to do so would be to stamp him as ungenteel, and shows a lack of common courtesy.

M. R. N.—The gentleman has treated you very shabbily, and it becomes his duty to offer an explanation of his queer conduct toward you. If this is not forthcoming, it would be better to forget him entirely, and not degrade your womanhood by making any advances. A man possessing such a capricious temper would doubtless make an unacceptable husband.

B. B.—When a gentleman escorts a lady to a neighbour's house, or, in fact, any other residence or public place, she should be allowed to enter first, the gentleman stopping at the entrance and politely bowing her in ahead of him. 2. In the case alluded to, you should accompany the lady from the gate up to the door of her residence, and not allow her to proceed such a distance alone.

M. M. J.—In several districts of Finland a religious sect has appeared based upon the fundamental principle of “female supremacy and male subjection.” Husband and wives bind themselves by oath to wear whatever yoke their partners choose to place upon them, and furthermore to make unreserved confession once a week of all delinquencies. A woman who has been chosen by her sister rulers to exercise unlimited authority within the community allots the penalties, which are promptly inflicted by robust and resolute matrons.

CORRY F.—1. A gentleman need not always walk on the right side of a lady, but will always consider which side he can the best protect her from the crowds. 2. At table a gentleman will always see that the lady is helped to all that she requires before helping himself to anything. He will also look out for her wants, and see that they are supplied during the entire meal before considering himself.

L. R. F.—The following lines may prove appropriate:—

“There's not a wind but whispers of thy name,
And not a flower that grows beneath the moon,
But in its hue and fragrance tells a tale
Of thee, my love.”

2. A very pretty motto for an engagement ring is: “For Time and Eternity.”

M. D. V.—The young lady is, doubtless, somewhat bashful when in your company, and is only waiting to become better acquainted, when it is likely that she will reciprocate your love. If she entertains such a high regard for you as indicated by your letter, the false reports concerning your character will have little weight with her. Endeavour in a delicate way to ascertain whether she truly loves you, and should this prove the case your future course will be an easy one.

H. D. F.—A successful sponge cake is made after this receipt:—One pint of sugar, one pint of flour, seven eggs—the whites and yolks beaten separately—half a teaspoonful of baking powder, little pinches of salt, one teaspoonful and a half of lemon extract; stir the flour in a little at a time, put the whites of the eggs in last, beating them thoroughly in. Bake in a long, narrow tin; line it with white paper, the sides as well as the bottom. You are then sure to have no trouble about taking it from the tin.

BLOSSOMS.

Roses, roses—who will buy
Pretty roses, frost and sweet,
Gathered while the daylight crept
Up the sky with shining feet?
Buy my pretty roses, dear,
And I'll tell you something true;
Kiss the blossoms for your love,
And your cheeks will steal their hue.

Pansies, pansies—buy, oh, buy,
Velvet pansies, with a trace,
On their upturned saucy leaves,
Of a roguish laughing face.
Buy my darling pansies, sweet,
And a charm I'll whisper you,
Lay the blossoms next your heart,
And its dreams will all come true.

Lilies, lilies—who will buy,
Royal lilies, pure and cold
As the drifted winter snows,
Save their quivering hearts of gold?
Buy the stainless blossoms, dear,
And I'll whisper something true:
Heart of gold, and spotless truth,
Someone waits to ask of you.

L. M. B.

CISSIE.—Pretty sprads for small tables, intended for *table à tête* sets of china, are made of a square of very heavy linen, with a border worked in outline or Kensington stitch, in bright-coloured silk or cotton. You can for a small sum have a pattern stamped on it. Be careful to test the silk or working cotton before using it, to make sure that it will not fade. Small napkins to match are much used, and they may have a simple decoration in one or two corners, if you do not care to spend so much time on them as a border will necessitate.

C. R.—A bill to allow a man to marry his deceased wife's sister has passed the House of Commons several times, but the House of Lords has invariably opposed the measure. The popular sentiment is decidedly with the House of Commons; and it is understood that the Queen is in favour of repealing the present law. The Prince of Wales has expressed himself as decidedly on the same side of the question, and it is not improbable that in a short time the will of the people will be compiled with. 2. We have not the space to spare for extended arguments on either side. 3. We shall have to refer you to Webster's unbridged dictionary for the information you desire on the subject of spelling.

J. B.—When the skin of an animal, carefully deprived of hair, fat, and other impurities, is immersed in a dilute solution of tannic acid, the animal matter gradually combines with the acid as it penetrates inward, forming a perfectly insoluble compound, which resists putrefaction completely. This is tanned leather. Lime-water is used for cleansing and preparing the skin; water containing sulphuric acid (or of vitriol) for raising or opening the pores, and an infusion of oak bark, sumac, or some other astringent matter for the source of the tannic acid. The process is necessarily a slow one, as dilute solutions only can be safely employed. Skins intended to be dressed for “uppers” commonly require about three weeks; thick hides, suitable for sole leather, on the other hand, take from two to eighteen months. Various plans have been tried to expedite the process, but with only moderate success, as the leather so produced is generally spongy, and of an inferior quality. A newsdealer or bookseller in your town would be a proper person from whom to obtain a book bearing on the subject of tanning. Several works of this description have been published, any one of which will suit your purpose.

P. S. J.—In preparing articles for silver-plating use a solution of weak lye to remove grease, and then scour with a hard brush and fine sand. The solution for silver-plating is made by adding to a solution of nitrate of silver (procured by dissolving silver in pure nitric acid) a solution of cyanide of potassium until no further precipitate is formed, but not enough to redissolve the precipitate already thrown down. Pour off the supernatant liquid, wash with water, and then redissolve the precipitate in cyanide of potassium. The anode (that surface of which the electric current enters, being the negative extremity of the decomposing body, by the agency of a galvanic battery) should be of silver. An ounce and a half of silver will give to a surface a foot square a coating as thick as common writing-paper. A moderate current should be used.

T. C. R.—The phrase, “running amuck,” is a corruption of a Malay expression—“running *amuk*.” The word *amuk* comes from another word that means to kill. The Malays, by a long-continued and excessive use of opium, become ferociously mad, and when one gets into this state he seizes a knife, rushes in frenzy from his house, and leaping along the street, stabs and bites every one who chances to be in his path. As soon as a person is seen in this state the cry of “*Amuk*” is raised on every side, which rouses the population as the cry of “mad dog” rouses any of our communities. The frenzied Malay is treated like a mad dog. Every man snatches the first weapon that comes to hand and follows the path of the common enemy, who is at last hemmed in and shot or speared to death. It is said that scores of persons are sometimes killed by one of these madmen before he can be caught and overcome.

H. H.—That department of medicine which treats of remedies, their doses, modes of using, and influences upon the constitution, is called *materia medica*. The agents employed in the treatment of the diseases are taken from three kingdoms of nature—the vegetable, the animal, and the mineral. The largest portion of medicinal substances are taken from the vegetable world. They consist of leaves, flowers, seeds, barks, and roots. These lose much or all of their medicinal powers unless gathered at the right seasons of the year, and are properly cured. The different parts of a plant are to be gathered when their peculiar juices are most abundant in them. For instance, bark, whether of the roots, trunk, or branches, must be gathered in autumn, or early in spring, when they part off most easily, and the dead outside and all the rotten parts being separated, they must be dried in the same manner as roots. The most active barks are generally from young trees.

S. R.—1. In Nathaniel Lee's play of *Alexander the Great* the line, “When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug of war,” occurs. 2. The expression “War to the knife,” is found in Lord Byron's “Childe Harold,” and is in the eighty-sixth stanza of the second canto. 3. The literature of modern Greece is still in its infancy, although of late years it has taken a stride forward, and several dramatic love-songs, poems, and novels have been written. Of all the modern Greek works yet published the “History of the Greek Revolution” by Trioupis, is considered the most valuable, not only for its statement of facts, but also for the purity and elegance of its style. Although many newspapers and periodicals in the modern Greek language are published in Athens, Constantinople, and elsewhere, it will require many years of good government, natural industry and prosperity, before Greece can assume that position in the literary world which the prestige of her name entitles her to anticipate.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—St. Vitus's dance is chiefly confined to children and youths between the ages of eight and fourteen. But few cases occur after puberty. When they do occur after that age they may be regarded as notable exceptions. The principal causes of St. Vitus's dance are these:—Overworking the mind, reading exciting books, overeating, fright, striking in or eruptions, &c. The services of an experienced and skillful practitioner are in many cases indispensable. The general treatment is this:—Remove all causes of excitement, take the children for a time from their daily tasks, and give them all the outdoor exercise possible. Take away all books and avoid every occasion for anger, fear, or any injurious excitement. Next regulate the diet, making it more animal and stimulating if it has been too low, and more vegetable and cooling if it has been too high. The bowels should be kept open with some gentle physic, and the body should be sponged every day, beginning with tepid water, and making it colder every day.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-half-pence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 245, Now Ready, price Sixpence; post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. XXXIX, bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF “THE LONDON READER,” 334, Strand, W.C.

† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. SPEAR; and Printed by WOODFALL and KINDE, Milford Lane, Strand.

